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THE STRUGGLE FOR SCHOOLS: EDUCATION, RACE, AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE CREEK NATION, 1820-1907

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DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the relationship between education and nationhood in the nineteenth-century Creek Nation. Over the course of the century, Creeks adapted schools as part of a larger nation-building effort to shape their own society and defend their sovereignty. Creeks built an extensive primary and secondary school system, financed, legislated, and managed by their national government. Education became an important political institution, produced new cultural expressions, and reinforced Creek identity. While the Creek government designed these national schools to privilege Native children, they simultaneously segregated Afro-Creek students and excluded Euro-American youths. By the 1890s, however, the forces of settler colonialism and white supremacy drastically altered the state of education in Indian Territory. When Oklahoma entered statehood in 1907, the federal government dissolved the Creek national school system, mandating that Native students attend newly formed public schools with white children or federally controlled boarding schools. Meanwhile, Afro-Creeks and African American settlers became subject to Jim Crow segregation. Although federal policies had dissolved the state apparatus that facilitated public schools, education persisted as an important component of Creek life during the twentieth century.

INTRODUCTION:

The pages that follow use education as a frame through which to tell the intersecting stories of two nations - the Creek Nation and the United States. Of course, educated Creeks during the nineteenth century had an intimate understanding of the relationship between these two polities. As Principal Chief Pleasant Porter eloquently explained in an address before the Creek Council in 1899:

> We have made ourselves an indestructable element in their national history. We have shown that what they believed to be arid and desert places were habitable and capable of sustaining millions of people. We have led the vanguard of civilization in our conflicts with them for tribal existence from ocean to ocean. The race that has rendered this service to the other races of mankind cannot perish utterly.

For Porter, the Creek education system gave credence to his belief that indigenous peoples rather than Euro-American colonizers who threatened his nation "led the vanguard of civilization."[1]

Porter was born in 1840 in the Creek Nation during a time of great tumult. He entered the world only a few years after the U.S. forcibly removed his people from their homelands in the Southeast to Indian Territory. Still recovering from the devastation of removal, the majority of Creeks remained antagonistic toward Euro-American colonizers, including missionaries who sought to impose "civilization" upon them. Although Creeks rejected interference with their cultural practices and intrusion into their political affairs, many individuals recognized the potential to adapt schools to protect their own interests during Porter's childhood. During the 1850s, he attended one of the earliest schools, Tullahassee Mission, where he studied English,

[1] Message of Porter to the National Council of Creeks, October 2, 1900, box 1, folder 35, Pleasant Porter Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma (hereafter cited as WHC).

mathematics, natural philosophy, history, and geography under the tutelage of a Presbyterian missionary family.[2]

As a product of the Creek education system, Porter contributed to his nation's schools throughout his long career. He championed the national education agenda as the inaugural Superintendent of Schools following the Civil War. Porter then filled a variety of leadership positions over the next forty years, while Creeks built, controlled, and expanded their own education system. When citizens elected him Principal Chief in 1899, the schools that he and others had spent half a century building fell under threat. Porter faced the tremendous challenge of defending his national institutions in the face of U.S. efforts to dismantle Creek sovereignty. Over the next eight years, the federal government assumed authority over the schools as he publically resisted the transition. He explained to U.S. officials, the schools "were the child of our sacrifice" but "you took it all away from us."[3] Porter was not alone in his efforts to create, expand, and protect a national education system.

Mary Lewis, Porter's former Tullahassee classmate and fellow education authority, publically called the legislation that dissolved Creek national institutions "a very solemn and important crisis in the history of the Indians."[4] At the time, Creeks heralded Lewis as "the oldest teacher in continuous service in Oklahoma and Indian

[2] John Bartlett Meserve, "Chief Pleasant Porter," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 26 (Autumn 1931): 318-334.

[3] "Statement of Hon. Pleasant Porter," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 638.

[4] Mary Lewis Scrapbook and newspaper article quoted in Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Two Notable Women of the Creek Nation," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 35 (Autumn 1957), 324, 319.

Territory, if not in the entire West."[5] In the 1850s, she had become the first Creek woman teacher in the fledgling school system and the first to teach English to non-English speaking children. She continued to serve in neighborhood schools and high schools as more and more opened in various towns, educating hundreds of Creek children from the 1850s through the 1890s. Throughout their long careers, both Lewis and Porter worked to nationalize a public education system, only to witness federal officials dismantle the fruits of their endeavors.

This study asserts that during the nineteenth century, members of the Creek Nation, along with neighboring Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles, used education as a tool of indigenous nation-building. In other words, over the course of decades Creeks adapted schools as one strategy to enhance to enhance their capacity for self-determination within the American settler colonial state. The Creek Nation built a school system as part of their larger effort to create self-governed and culturally appropriate institutions. After periods of rejection in the 1820s and 1830s and experimentation in the 1840s, citizens adapted schools to serve their needs. Following the American Civil War, students participated in an extensive system of primary and secondary public education subsidized, legislated, and managed by their own national government. The system became a central cultural and political institution, reinforcing rather than supplanting Creek identity. While the Creek government designed the schools to privilege Native children, at times they also marginalized Afro-Indian students and excluded Euro-American youths who had no legal claim to Creek citizenship. Creeks' exclusion of white colonizers challenged the racial hierarchy

[5] "Life and Experiences of a Creek Indian Woman, Mrs. Mary Lewis Herrod," interview 7074, vol. 1, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC; Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Two Notable Women of the Creek Nation," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 35 (Autumn 1957), 315-337.

structuring educational opportunity in the late nineteenth-century United States, in which Euro-Americans typically occupied a privileged status. Concerns over access to schools only hastened white settlers' colonization attempts, which severely threatened the Creek Nation's sovereignty. In response, Creek leaders and the broader citizenry worked to defend their educational institutions even as their political survival became tenuous. Federal policies then dismantled their national government and dissolved the state apparatus that facilitated public schools. Formal education, however, had been an important component of Creek life for nearly six decades and it persisted as a Creek tradition during the twentieth century.

The educational experiences of Creek citizens during the nineteenth century differed considerably from the previous century. Prior to the introduction of western-style schools, the social and political structure of Creek society shaped childhood experiences. In the eighteenth century, Creeks organized their world into a system of autonomous towns with distinct cultural characteristics. Towns often developed independent diplomatic and trade relationships with neighboring Native Americans and Europeans. Geographic location and clan affiliation loosely divided the towns into Upper and Lower divisions held together in a flexible coalition. Racial makeup, cultural practices, or even a uniform language did not dictate membership. Instead, matrilineal kinship connections and town affiliation determined belonging. Within this system, identity remained fluid as Creeks frequently adopted outsiders into kinship networks. Community relationships within towns and familial ties within matrilineal kin groups shaped the worldview of children.[6]

[6] John R. Swanton, *An Early History of the Creeks and Their Neighbors*, Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 73 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922). For an in-

Matrilocal practices also molded children's day-to-day experiences. While husbands typically lived in their wives' households, they did not play the primary role in child rearing. Instead, mothers, maternal uncles, and clan elders "instructed, counseled, and protected" young children. These maternal relatives frequently "gathered the children to tell stories illustrative of clan loyalty, respect to elders, concern for others, and other Creek virtues." Maternal uncles and elders also taught young boys hunting and warring practices. Mothers, on the other hand, socialized girls and trained them in agricultural labor and other village and family responsibilities. All children interacted daily with their natural environment. Each morning they would bathe in nearby streams and then help their mothers and maternal relatives with gathering food, fishing, and hunting. All of these practices served to educate and socialize children as members of kinship groups. In the nineteenth century, Creek children continued to interact with the natural environment and labor to support family economies. Nevertheless, institutional education in schools complemented and at times displaced these forms of experiential education.[7]

Ceremonial life of towns also shaped Creek childhood experiences prior to the 1800s. Youths attended the most important ceremony in Creek life, the annual busk, a thanksgiving celebration that coincided with the arrival of the annual corn crop. At this event, community members experienced spiritual renewal, forgave crimes, and reinforced social responsibilities. Adults gathered children together and taught them

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depth history of Creek coalescence and political history during the eighteenth century see Steven C. Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). For an in-depth study of an individual Creek town see Joshua Piker, *Okfuskee: A Creek Indian Town in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). For a contemporary observation see William Bartram, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians,* eds. Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), 146-147.

[7] Benjamin W. Griffith, Jr. *McIntosh and Weatherford, Creek Indian Leaders* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 11-22.

ceremonial customs and beliefs while reinforcing social roles and duties to their families and towns. Youths also took part in political life. Each year when town leaders met for the Grand Council, children would gather at the end of the headmen's deliberations to participate in a ceremonial dance.[8] After feasting and public entertainment, "the young people began their music and dancing in the square…this frolick lasted all night," according to one observer.[9] Young males nearing adulthood also participated in ceremonial sports and games. Stickball games were the most elaborate and central form of recreation, as well as an important part of inter-town relationships. These various ceremonial activities socialized children and educated them in the history and customs of their society.[10] Spiritual and political ceremonial education persisted into the nineteenth century but changed considerably as patriarchy, Christianity, and political centralization reshaped Creek society.

With the introduction of western-style schools by white, Christian missionaries in the early 1800s, the nature of education and its role in Creek society underwent a transformation. Prior to the 1830s, the majority of Creeks resisted Euro-American missionaries' efforts to "civilize" them since their teachings disrupted social and political relations. Removal sparked political, economic, and social turmoil, in addition to death, violence, and emotional trauma. It also marked a formative experience for political and social reorganization. After resettling in Indian Territory, Creeks continued to resist federal intrusion but incorporated several tenets of "civilization" - literacy, Christianity, and republicanism – into their continuing project of nation-

[8] Griffith, *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 19-20. For a contemporary description of the busk see William Bartram, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians*, 149-150.

[9] William Bartram, *The Travels of William Bartram*, ed. Francis Harper (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 149.

[10] Griffith, *McIntosh and Weatherford*, 30-35.

building.[11] An ongoing process of political centralization led to new and hybridized educational experiences among Creeks.

As part of the rebuilding effort after removal, Creeks adapted schools previously controlled by Euro-Americans as national institutions under governmental control. Education not only served as a tool for shaping Creek society but also as a defense mechanism for thwarting further colonization attempts. During the 1840s and 1850s, different sectors of Creek society experimented with primary education and manual labor education to adapt schools to best fit their needs and protect their interests. Following the American Civil War, the Creek government increasingly centralized and built on the fledgling antebellum schools to create a national system of primary and secondary education. Between the 1870s and the 1890s, leaders considerably enlarged and reformed the national schools in an ongoing effort to benefit the nation's children, solidify Creek political authority, and thwart federal intervention. Both English and Muskogee literacy developed and expanded in relation with the schools. Literacy served as a powerful political tool and fostered hybrid cultural forms, social customs, and vibrant intellectual life.[12] New generations of literate citizens served important leadership roles and worked to defend Creek sovereignty.

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[11] For a detailed history of Creek removal see Michael D. Green, *The Crisis of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

[12] Amanda Cobb argues, "Literacy, for the Chickasaw Nation, was a tool, a weapon used defensively and offensively in the fight for their national survival." The same is true for the Creek Nation. Amanda Cobb-Greetham, *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852-1949* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 16. In addition to Cobb, other Native American Studies and Native American Literature scholars have influenced my inquiry into these forms literacy and intellectualism. These include Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Joshua B. Nelson, *Progressive Traditions: Identity in Cherokee Literature and Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

As the school system expanded, it reflected hierarchies of gender, race, and class. Gender ideology dictated divergent paths for males and females. Educated men often filled government positions or pursued business, while educated Creek women, like Mary Lewis, pursued careers in the school system if they did not remain at home as wives and mothers. Elite Creeks made a concerted effort to limit the opportunities for Afro-Creek students in an effort to advance a racialized vision of Creek nationalism. Nevertheless, Afro-Creeks consistently used collective political power in pursuit of equal educational access. Lower class Creeks also critiqued the shroud of exclusivity and elitism surrounding education, and in doing so ushered in education reforms in the nation. Thus, Creeks shaped the national school system across lines of gender, race, and class, creating increasingly inclusive education policies, opportunities, and experiences.

The Creek Nation and the neighboring Native polities in Indian Territory served as the vanguard for establishing public school systems west of the Mississippi River in the early nineteenth century. Over the next six decades, they nationalized schools and defended their right to control them. Meanwhile, the United States engaged in its own nation-building project, attempting to colonize the western half of North America and incorporate the vast region into the nation-state. As these simultaneous processes unfolded, the schools in Indian Territory commonly offered more educational opportunities to Native Americans than those available to Euro-American colonizers in the West. Nevertheless, as white settlers attempted to move to Indian Territory they claimed to spread "civilization" in a "savage" land. To their surprise, upon their arrival, they found thriving schools and a widely literate Native populace. Indian Territory was

a haven of educational opportunity carved into the rural landscape of the West not by federal officials or previous white settlers, but by the sovereign Native nations.

"The Struggle for Schools" demonstrates that schools in Indian Territory complicate the broader history of education in the U.S. during the second half of the nineteenth century. Traditionally, the educational experiences of Native Americans and African Americans have been characterized by exclusion and marginalization within an overarching framework of white privilege and power, especially in the American common school system. In the Creek Nation, however, schools privileged people of color while excluding Euro-Americans. The majority of white residents in Indian Territory had no claim to citizenship among the Five Tribes and therefore had no right to attend schools funded and controlled by their governments. This complex situation runs counter to our common understanding of white dominance and supposedly "advanced" Euro-American culture. In Indian Territory from the 1840s to the 1910s, many Native children had more access to formal schooling than white children in the region.

Euro-American colonizers increasingly characterized their lack of access to the Native schools as a crisis and pressured the federal government to provide education for their children. For federal officials who had long-time ambitions to territorialize Creek country, the growing education crisis further justified their agenda. Consequently, they dismantled the Creek government, allotted land, and placed education under federal supervision with a series of legislation. Meanwhile, Afro-Creeks and African American migrants to Indian Territory faced Jim Crow segregation in newly organized Oklahoma schools. By the beginning of the twentieth century, racism and federal policies had

reshaped schools in the region to reflect U.S. national trends. Throughout this transition, Creeks, including Lewis and Porter, resisted federal authority and defended their right to control their own educational institutions.

Scholars and activists widely recognize that during the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, local indigenous control over education has become a fundamental part of self-determination and nation-building. For instance, sociologist Duane Champagne argues, "Education is one critical aspect of the nation building process that introduces skills and knowledge that are useful for the construction and continuity of Native institutions." He suggests, "Ideally, Western education forms, skills, and knowledge will be combined with Native forms of education, skills, and knowledge in order to find culturally unique solutions to contemporary and future social, economic, and cultural conditions."[13] Despite the clear value of education to contemporary Native nations, few scholars have adequately historicized this development. This study corrects that omission.

To do so, the analysis will shed light on the large numbers of Creeks and other Native peoples who pursued their own educational experiences. Such an investigation is necessary to recognize and examine historic models of Native controlled education and its importance to self-determination. Education historian Donald Warren has critiqued the heavy focus on Native learning in western-style schools, arguing these studies contribute to the misconception that "prior to Euroamerican invasions the Indigenous peoples of the United States lacked enduring practices and teaching and learning." Indigenous peoples not only possessed diverse and enduring forms of education before

[13] Ismael Abu-Saad and Duane Champagne, eds. *Indigenous Education and Empowerment: International Perspective* (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2005), 151.

European contact, they also continued to employ them during the nineteenth century. Creeks did not simply borrow western systems of knowledge. Instead, they adapted English literacy and schools, creating their own institutions. There are important historical lessons to be learned from examining Native controlled institutions during the nineteenth century.[14] Thus, this work responds directly to Duane Champagne's assertion that "Theories of colonization must move in the direction of detailed conceptualization of the institutional – political, economic, community, and cultural – order of indigenous nations…to develop a more complete and balanced understanding of the complexities of life among the colonized."[15] As such, much of the analysis that follows revolves around schools as institutions, as well as their larger impact on the Creek Nation.

Native American education has been a rich topic of scholarly inquiry for a number of decades but few scholars have seriously investigated Native-controlled institutions. The majority of studies focus on federal education in boarding schools, the experiences of students in these schools, and the larger effects of assimilation policy on indigenous communities.[16] Scholars often exclude education in Indian Territory from broad histories of the assimilation era because of its distinctive trajectory. In his

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[14] David Wallace Adams suggests the same in his response to Warren's essay and the other essayists in the *History of Education Quarterly's* thematic issues on the education history of Native Americans which argues that while there is still much work to be done, "don't forget about the schools." *History of Education Quarterly 54* (August 2014), 263, 385.

[15] Duane Champagne, *Social Change and Cultural Continuity Among Native American Nations* (Lanham: Alta Mira Press, 2007), 141.

[16] For example see Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984) and David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding Experience, 1875, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995). A number of case studies examine Indian identity and agency at specific schools. See K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Clyde Ellis, *To Change Them Forever: Indian Education at the Rainy Mountain Boarding School, 1893-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); and Myriam Vuckovic, *Voices from Haskell: Indian Students Between Two Worlds, 1884-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008) for examples.

seminal study on federal boarding schools, for instance, historian David Wallace Adams explains that the schools "exempted from this study are those associated with the so-called 'five civilized tribes,' a story sufficiently unique as to require a separate investigation."[17]

"The Struggle for Schools" argues that while distinctive, the history of education in the Creek Nation and Indian Territory more broadly, are still inextricably linked to the assimilation policies, progressive era ideologies, and settler colonial discourse that shaped the federal boarding school narrative.[18] During the progressive era, assimilationists counterpoised white "civilization" with Native "savagery" in an effort to justify conquest, land dispossession, and the larger American colonial project. Creeks who controlled their own schools, rather than depending on the federal government to "civilize" them, not only defied racial expectations but also undermined the colonial rationale. As federal officials designed assimilation policies to facilitate the dispossession of Native land and erase indigenous distinctiveness in American nation-state, they did not exclude the Five Tribes. If anything, Creeks posed a more serious threat to white settlers and federal officials than many other Native polities because their "civilization" and political apparatus served as defense mechanisms. Unable to ignore the widespread English literacy, Christianity, capitalism, and republicanism among the Five Tribes, Euro-Americans had to develop a more complex strategy to colonize Indian Territory. Settlers and U.S. politicians launched a combined effort to discredit the Native governments by labelling their schools as failures and denouncing

[17] Adams, *Education for Extinction*, x.

[18] This interpretation brings nuance to Fred Hoxie's rationalization to exclude the southeastern Native nations from his study on the assimilation era: "I have therefore paid little attention to the many eastern tribes that my subjects ignored, and – like them – have treated Oklahoma as a special case with limited significance for national policy formulation." Hoxie, *A Final Promise*, xxi.

their communal land use. In a multi-pronged assault, the federal government then extended assimilation policy to impose federal control over education in Indian Territory, dismantle the indigenous governments, and allot their land.

Only two works, Devon Mihusuah's *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* and Amanda Cobb-Greetham's *, Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories: The Bloomfield Academy for Chickasaw Females, 1852-1949,* have begun the investigation into education among the Five Tribes. Both scholars offer case studies of specific schools operated by Native governments.[19] These books provide an important foundation and without them, this study would not exist. Both offer detailed and nuanced histories of female academies in the Cherokee and Chickasaw Nations, the various forms of literacy that emerged from these institutions, and the effects of education on broader social relations. They argue that the Cherokee Female Seminary and Bloomfield Academy differed considerably from federal boarding schools. I agree but would likewise argue that their conclusions can be placed within a broader context to show how the various types of schools funded and managed by the tribal nations shaped the diverse educational experiences of Native, Afro-Indian, African American, and Euro-American children in Indian Territory. Thus, this project investigates education within a context of indigenous nationhood. That said, it is not a comprehensive study of Creek schools. Instead, it explores the process of nationalizing institutions, the larger political and cultural uses of education, and the various individuals and polities who pursued a right to schooling in Indian Territory.

[19] Cobb-Greetham, *Listening to Our Grandmothers' Stories*; Mihusuah, Devon. *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

All of this unfolded as part of the larger, ongoing process of settler colonialism. Historian Walter L. Hixon explains that settler colonialism stemmed from the ideology in which "Euro-American settlers imagined that it was their destiny to take control of colonial space and nothing would deter them from carrying out that project."[20] Anthropologist Patrick Wolfe suggests that to carry out this project Euro-American settlers employed a "logic of elimination" towards indigenous peoples in pursuit of their end goal – the acquisition of land.[21] Certainly, Creeks' efforts to adapt schools can be understood as one response to Euro-American efforts to colonize their land, first in the southeast, and then in Indian Territory and the subsequent cycles of trauma, transformation, and revitalization.

In her study of indigenous child removal policies, however, Margaret Jacobs suggests that settler colonialism not only involved the physical colonization of indigenous land but also the cultural elimination of indigenous institutions and practices.[22] I assert that Creek institutions, specifically the national schools, became the target of Euro-American settlers intent on the cultural elimination of indigeneity. Colonizers spun a narrative in which they cast themselves as victims of the Creek educational policies. Using this victimization narrative to "obfuscate conquest and colonialism" and to justify their actions, settlers proceeded to colonize the Creeks' education system in addition to their land.[23] As such, this analysis includes the

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[20] Walter L. Hixson, American Settler Colonialism: A History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

[21] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387.

[22] Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 4.

[23] Jacobs suggests that "a curious feature of settler colonialism is that its founding and enduring narratives often obsfucate conquest and colonialism and their attendant violence, instead portraying European

perspectives of white federal officials, children, parents, teachers, and community leaders who intruded on Native sovereignty and demanded educational privileges.[24] Such an approach illuminates the relationship between colonialism, education, and indigenous nation-building.

The process of Creek nation-building cannot be separated from the simultaneous process of American nation-building.[25] The same developments that shaped the United States during the nineteenth century, profoundly affected the trajectory of the Creek Nation. The multicultural Creek society reflected the larger interconnections between Native American, African American, and Euro-Americans in the nineteenth-century South. As slaveholding and racial ideology became divisive issues in the American nation-state, these same factors created factions in Creek society. Ironically, despite the fact that some Creeks adopted slavery in response to colonial policies, they were removed Indian Territory to open up land for Euro-American settlement and the

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settlers primarily as victims and resistors of a different kind of tyranny. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 4.

[24] For example another example that examine indigenous education in the United States using the conceptual framework of settler colonialism see Cathleen Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). For international perspectives see G. J. Gei and A. Kempf, eds. *Anti-Colonialism and Education* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2006) and Brian Klopotek and Brenda Child, eds., *Indian Subjects: Hemispheric Perspectives on the History of Indigenous Education* (SAR Press, 2014).

[25] Several studies in the past decade have analyzed the nationalism and nationhood among the Five Tribes within the broader context of nineteenth century American history, emphasizing issues of race, citizenship, and state expansion. Specifically, Claudio Saunt's *Black, White, and Indian*, David Chang's *The Color of Land*, and Gary Zellar's *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation* have explored the connections between race, class, and nationalism in the post-removal Creek Nation. Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David Chang, *The Color of Land Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Gary*Creeks* Zellar, *African : Estelvste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007); Other recent studies to examine the Indian nations in Indian Territory during the nineteenth century include Fay A. Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation*: *Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); Rose Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family*: *Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Jeff Fortney, "Robert M. Jones and the Choctaw Nation: Indigenous Nationalism in the American South," unpublished dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2014.

expansion of slavery. Then the American Civil War triggered disastrous results as the Creek Nation became absorbed in the conflict between the states. Subsequent federal attempts at reconstructing the American nation-state and incorporating western territories ushered in new threats for the Creek nation.[26] Thus, the American colonization of indigenous lands and the expanding reach of the federal government into western states shape the narrative in the pages that follow. Because the Creek Nation bridges the divide that has often shaped distinct regional narratives in American history, I assert that it provides a crucial opportunity for reconsidering the significant role of Native nations in the larger process of American nation-building.

Just as Native Americans must be present in the larger narrative of American history, African Americans and Afro-Indians must also be included in any discussion of education in the Creek Nation and the United States. Most Creek citizens, however, did not fit into clear-cut racial categories. With the influx of African American and Euro-American settlers in Creek country during the late nineteenth century, racial and political identities became even more blurred. Rather than a straightforward comparison of Native American education with African American education, this study explores the ways in educational policies, opportunities, and experiences of Native Americans, African Americans, Afro-Indians, and mixed race peoples intertwined. [27]

[26] Scholars who place the southeastern Native nations within the broader context of Southern history include Andrew Frank, Tiya Miles, Barbara Krauthamer, Fay Yarbrough, and Claudio Saunt.

[27] Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009) and Kim Cary Warren, *The Quest for Citizenship: African American and Native American Education in Kansas, 1880-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) provide a useful starting point for comparisons between Native American and African American educational policies.

This approach reveals how diverse communities and individuals accepted, rejected, or tried to shape education for their own purposes.

Creek citizens, including those of African descent, built and controlled their national school system as part of a larger effort to maintain their own sovereign polity. Though the Creek Nation supported separate schools for Afro-Creeks, these people worked hard to claim the rights of Creek citizenship while resisting the ideology of black inferiority. By doing so, they participated in Creek nation-building, rather than pursuing their own distinct political status or integration in the American nation-state. Afro-Creeks' approach set them apart from many African Americans in the United States who made schools central components of their communities in pursuit of integration and equal citizenship in the United States, despite the systematic oppression they faced.[28]

The Creek Nation, then, is a useful for reconsidering the history of education in nineteenth-century America. Not only does it complicate the familiar narratives of education in both the South and West, but also it illuminates the diverse forms of schooling in the United States during this period. Historians have widely argued that the lacking school systems in the South compared unfavorably to urban centers in the North. Southern institutions typically served the economic elite while marginalizing women and people of color. The Creek Nation, however, built thriving and increasingly

[28] James D. Anderson's foundational study, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1869-1935* argues, "Black education developed in the context of political and economic oppression." James D. Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2. For more on the relationship between education, race, and citizenship in the United States see Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2001); Andrea Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

inclusive school systems that offered superior education to those in neighboring Southern states. Moreover, they did so not in urban centers—where common schools thrived in the North— but in rural areas of the west where white Americans struggled to obtain public schooling.

When the Creek Nation's education system is placed within the larger framework of American educational history rather than within a regional context, it becomes even more revealing.[29] As historian William Reese argues in his comprehensive study, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind,"* "Historically, legally, and practically, public schools are in fact largely controlled by state laws and locally governed."[30] Unlike American public schools, which remained decentralized throughout the nineteenth century, citizens of the Creek Nation increasingly centralized their schools to form a national system. Leaders often compared their nation's schools to those in the neighboring states, arguing that the quality of Creek education exceeded struggling, rural schools in the United States. They also articulated the powerful argument that because of their thriving schools, Creeks equaled or surpassed their Euro-American brethren in intelligence and "civilization." Thus, the Creek national school system provides a rich opportunity for reconsidering the quality and variety of schools in nineteenth-century America and the ways in which diverse groups shaped and utilized education.

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[29] In his seminal work on American education, Carl Kaestle asserts that during the antebellum period, "America had schools, but except in large cities, America did not have school systems." Examining the Creek Nation provides a wider lens to interpret public school systems, not in the urban North but in the rural South and West. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1983), 62.

[30] William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 1. Also see pages 10-44 for an examination of the urban north as the nexus of the common school movement.

Several questions guide my examination of education in the nineteenth-century Creek Nation. How did settler colonialism create structural inequalities in education? What is the relationship between African American, Native American, and Euro-American educational histories, policies, and experiences in the United States? How have minorities used education as a tool to resist colonial policies? By pursuing these lines of inquiry, it becomes clear that scholars cannot view the educational histories of American Indians, African Americans, and Euro-Americans as distinct trajectories. Instead, we must understand the ways in which they have intersected and shaped each other.

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A Word on Terminology

I use the term "Creek" to describe the diverse members of the nineteenth-century Creek Nation, including those with Native, European, and African heritage. At the time, this term indicated belonging through kinship and legal citizenship status. Although the term "Muskogee" is often used interchangeably with Creek, historically it applied to one of the diverse groups that had coalesced into the Creek Nation. Yuchis, for example, belonged to the Creek Nation but maintained their own distinct language and culture. In twenty-first century contexts, "Muscogee (Creek) Nation" is the official term.

The terms "indigenous," "Native American," and "American Indian" are used interchangeably throughout this study. However, it should be noted that indigenous is an enveloping term that can be used transnationally. Likewise, "tribal nations," "indigenous nations," and "Native nations" are used interchangeably. "Five Tribes" is

used collectively to refer to the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek and Seminole Nations.

Afro-Indians, or more specifically Afro-Creeks, refers to people of African or mixed African and Creek descent who were either slaves or free individuals adopted as citizens of the Creek Nation following the Civil War. African American refers to people of African descent from the United States, including those who migrated to Creek country throughout the nineteenth century but did not become citizens. That said, these terms and the categories they reflect often became blurred throughout the nineteenth century as racial identities and citizenship requirements shifted.

CHAPTER ONE:

EARLY CREEK EDUCATION

In 1823, Isaac Smith instructed about a dozen students in a small schoolroom in the Chattahoochee Valley near the Creek town of Coweta. Smith, an older man, had already led a full life as a Revolutionary War soldier and a South Carolina businessman. In his youth, he converted to Methodism and dallied with the ministry for a brief period. Later in life, he returned to spread the gospel.[1] Smith traveled to Creek country to "civilize" the native inhabitants at a time when the dominant national discourse on Native peoples deemed them culturally and racially inferior. Smith entered a multi-cultural world deeply connected to his own. Practices of racial slaveholding, agricultural production, trade, diplomatic negotiations, and community life shaped everyday experiences; strange customs he viewed as "savage" and "uncivilized" existed in tandem with the more familiar ones. After teaching a small group of local children for less than a year, Smith reported, "considerable difficulties have arisen in the way of preaching the gospel to the natives of this nation." Frustrated, he found that many of the diverse peoples who inhabited the territory did not welcome his presence. They did not appreciate his efforts to save their souls or his interference with the upbringing their children. With time, he hoped that "patient perseverance may overcome," allowing him to carry out what he believed to be God's plan of manifest destiny for the new republic.[2] Despite Smith's optimism, his difficulties persisted.

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[1] Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, 1893), 369; W. Thad Chesser, "Asbury Manual Labor School and Mission." General Commission on Archives and History: The Methodist Church, http://www.gcah.org/research/travelers-guide/asbury-manual-labor-school-and-mission.

[2] *The Methodist Magazine*, 1823, Volume 6 (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason), 276.

The presence of indigenous peoples in North America, including their sovereign claim over territory and their continued geopolitical power, created an obstacle to political and cultural homogeneity in the burgeoning "empire of liberty."[3] The fledgling federal government attempted to use education as part of a broader "civilization" program to gain imperial control over the indigenous population of the continent. Subsequently, missionaries like Smith and federal officials worked to implement western-style education, Christianity, and private property holding among Southern indigenous polities prior to and following Indian removal in the 1830s. Their actions led to ongoing resistance and adaptation, as Native peoples selectively embraced and rejected tenets of "civilization" policy to fit their own agendas.

This chapter argues that with the introduction of schools in Creek country, western-style education served as a disruptive force that emerged in concert with broader disturbances in social, political, and economic practices. Although a small number of Creeks attended schools, hostility toward Euro-American controlled education prevailed. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a small minority of Creeks attended colonial schools outside of Creek territory as the society became increasingly connected with the African American and Euro-American peoples inhabiting the South. For the most part, matrilineal kinship networks and other customs mitigated any colonial threat that Euro-American education posed to their culture and politics. However, the impact of formal education in Creek society changed when missionaries opened schools in the territory. The missions challenged traditional gender roles, disturbed racial hierarchies, and upset customs including matrilineal kinship, spiritual life, and power relations. Unlike their

[3] Thomas Jefferson used this phrase to describe the new American republic as an expanding empire that would rival Great Britain. See Peter Onuf, *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood* (University of Virginia Press, 2000).

Cherokee and Choctaw neighbors who more readily embraced schools, the majority of Creeks feared intrusion by Euro-American educators would hasten attempts to dispossess them of land and erode their political sovereignty. They viewed white educators with suspicion and strongly reacted against their interference in internal matters. As the colonization of their land and their forced relocation to Indian Territory unfolded, hostilities towards missionaries intensified. The presence of missionary educators triggered conflict and even violent encounters indicative of the larger disarray caused by colonialism in Creek society at the time.

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During the late eighteenth century, increasing cultural diversity in the South began to augment already existing forms of education. The fluid nature of Native American society and the realities of trade and diplomacy in the region resulted in the influx of diverse European American, African American, and Native American peoples. For instance, white captives, refugees, interpreters, merchants, and traders became interspersed among the Creek towns. The deerskin trade led Euro-American men, many of them Scottish and Spanish, to travel through and settle down in villages. By 1790, a U.S. Army lieutenant estimated that at least three hundred Euro-American men lived in the territory although the actual number was likely much higher. Intermarriages between these men and Native women were prevalent and produced untold numbers of children. Many of these children were raised according to matrilineal practices and were often indistinguishable from Native children in language and customs. In some cases, however, Euro-American fathers played an active role in their children's lives

and sought western-style education outside of their mothers' society.[4] Their experiences marked the earliest Creek exposure with schools – the institutional form of education they would eventually adapt to fit their own society.

At the time, however, schools remained an external, colonial tool that served to disconnect individuals from the Creek world. As Andrew Frank argues in *Creeks and Southerners*, "Many Creeks learned how to behave and appear like European Americans because their European American fathers sent them to schools outside of their villages."[5] Alexander McGillivray, the son of the trader Lachlan McGillivray, received a formal education for nearly a decade under the direction of his cousin Farquhar McGillivray in Charleston, South Carolina. In addition to Greek, Latin, English history, and literature, he gained firsthand experience with Euro-American social norms. Early biographer John Walton Caughey explains, the fourteen-year-old Alexander "left behind the language of his youth, customs, conventions, and usages to which he was accustomed."[6] McGillivray returned to Creek country where he capitalized on his clan ties, business connections he forged in Charleston, and English literacy. He gained power and served as a diplomat in several treaty negotiations with Spain and the United States. His political sway, however, declined after he ceded land to the United States in 1790. Leaders no longer trusted him to serve the best interests of their people in negotiations with U.S. officials.[7] Though these leaders recognized the

[4] Andrew Frank, *Creeks and Southerners: Biculturalism on the Early American Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 26-28.

[5] Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 64.

[6] John Walton Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 1938, reprint: (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), 15. Also see Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 65-68.

[7] John Walton Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, xvi-xvii.

power of literacy, they also feared education in American schools could corrupt their own and could be used to the detriment of their people.[8]

As a result, matrilineal relatives often preferred that the children of intermarriages not receive schooling outside of Creek country. Instead, many bicultural children continued to experience more established forms of education identical to other children in their towns. As agent Benjamin Hawkins noted, "The traders, several of whom have amassed considerable fortunes, have almost all of them been as inattentive to their children as the Indians."[9] Hawkins, of course, did not fully grasp the matrilineal practices that made mothers and maternal uncles rather than fathers the primary caregivers. At the turn of the nineteenth century, matrilineal practices typically continued to dictate the terms of childrearing even when Euro-American fathers did have an active presence in their children's lives. While Euro-American fathers orchestrated the opportunity for their children to receive formal schooling, mothers and maternal uncles determined whether they would actually attend. In many cases, they did not permit the children to be removed from their villages. For instance, the Scots-American trader William McIntosh Sr. encountered this first hand when he attempted to subvert the wishes of his wife and her family by taking his sons to Scotland to attend

[8] When Spain gained control of Florida in 1783, Spanish fathers had the option to send their children from Creek villages to schools in Florida. Spanish officials intended these schools to be a colonial apparatus designed to instruct Native American children in Catholicism and Spanish literacy. Other European fathers of bicultural children sent them to schools in Georgia and Alabama. In 1799, two brothers from New England settled near Creek territory on Lake Tensaw in what became Alabama. While William Pierce pursued the profitable weaving business, his brother John, a teacher, established "the first American school in Alabama." According to early Alabama historian Albert Pickett, "There the highblood descendants of Lachlan McGillivray – the Taits, Weatherfords and Durants, the aristocratic Linders, the wealthy Mims, and the children of many others, first learned to read. The pupils were strangely mixed in blood and their color was of every hue." Dozens of children of Euro-American and Creek intermarriages attended this early school at the turn of the century. See Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 64-65; Albert James Pickett, *History of Alabama and Incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi*, Volume II, 3rd Edition (Charleston: Walker and James, 1851), 190.

[9] Hawkins, Benjamin, *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins*, edited by Thomas Foster (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 57.

school. The boys' uncles successfully retrieved the boys from a ship while it was still in the Savannah port and returned them to their village.[10] Even in the case of Alexander McGillivray, Lachlan McGillivray had to obtain permission from his wife Sehoy in order to send the boy to Charleston.[11] The persistence of matrilineal practices, as well as the lack of schools in Creek territory, mitigated the access of children of mixed Euro-American and Creek ancestry to western-style education. Thus, formal schools did not significantly alter social customs during the eighteenth century.

Increased acculturation from the 1790s through the 1810s, however, created new opportunities for elite, literate individuals to rise to positions of power. Benjamin Hawkins served as the principal agent to the Creeks during this period and his tenure coincided with a period of rapid social and political change in the region. After stablishing the agency at the Lower Creek town of Coweta, he worked directly to implement "civilization" policy. He pushed the Creeks toward a more centralized government, private property, commercial agriculture, slaveholding, and racial ideology.[12] The uneven integration of these various Euro-American practices and

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[10] Frank, *Creeks and Southerners*, 66.

[11] Caughey, *McGillivray of the Creeks*, 15

[12] For more on Hawkins tenure see, Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 66-71. For a more detailed discussion of the acculturative practices adopted by the Creeks during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, see Ethridge, *Creek Country* and Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Whereas kinship traditionally dictated identity in Creek society, race and the state of being free or unfree began to play a more prominent role in dictating social status at this time. While Hawkins lived among the Creeks, more affluent families considerably increased the number of chattel slaves they owned and became progressively reliant on slave labor in the emerging economic system. As chattel slavery became more common among Southern indigenous societies during this period, members the Creek and the other Five Tribes transitioned from being predominantly slave traders to slaveholders. Christina Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country: The Changing Face of Captivity in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). In *A New Order of Things* Claudio Saunt explains the transition from slave trading to slaveholding in terms of the growing property accumulation among an elite and politically powerful group. In other words, slaves become one form of property along with money, livestock, and other valuable commodities accumulated by a minority of Creeks in "the new order of things" that emerged by the first decade of the nineteenth century. See pages 111-135. Robbie Ethridge, *Creek*

beliefs triggered dramatic societal changes during the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

Although schools remained an external feature to Creek society at the turn of the century, educated Creeks did not. Their ability to write, in particular, afforded them substantial power. Claudio Saunt suggests that Euro-American systems of writing had preoccupied Creeks since the early colonial period. By the late eighteenth century, leaders equated the ability to write with power because "whites insisted that writing legitimatized and validated talks."[13] Alexander McGillivray and others, many of whom were members of his matrilineal clan, returned to their families and towns after attending schools in U.S. cities. Upon their return, they played a critical role in hastening cultural, political, and economic change at the turn of the century. McGillivray's nephew, David Tate, for instance, attended school in Philadelphia and then Scotland. After returning, he became one of the wealthiest slave owners among his people.[14]

Unlike Tate, who attended foreign schools, his half-brother Lamotochee, another maternal nephew of Alexander McGillivray, creatively shaped his own hybrid form of Creek and Euro-American education. Lamotochee, also known as William Weatherford, refused to learn to read or write English. Under the direction of his uncle, however, he mastered speaking the language in hopes that it would add to his political

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Country: The Creek Indians and Their World (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1; Unlike Southern whites, however, who defined blackness by as the possession of any degree of African blood, Creeks codified blackness to equate to an unfree status. For instance, a written law passed in 1818 stipulated that if a black man killed a Creek man he would face execution but if a Creek man killed a black man, he must reimburse the black man's owner. This demonstrates that Creeks largely defined being black as being a slave. See Michael D. Green, *The Crisis of Indian Removal: Creek Government and Society in Crisis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 70.

[13] Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 187, 190.

[14] Hawkins, *The Collected Works*, 40s.

prowess in councils and aid in negotiations with Euro-Americans. He also benefited from the tutelage of another educated maternal uncle, LeClerc Milfort, who taught him how to speak French. By drawing on familial connections with the white world, Lamotochee selectively embraced only the aspects of Euro-American culture that he found politically and socially useful, while rejecting those he did not want. Interestingly, he shaped his education through traditional means by relying on the knowledge of his maternal uncles. Lamotochee used these skills to rise to prominence through his matrilineal Wind Clan to become leader of the Upper Creek towns.[15]

Not only did their varying educational experiences shape Tate and Lamotochee's alternative paths to prominence, their divergent reactions to Euro-American culture reflect growing disruptions in Creek society at the time. Like Lamotochee, many Creeks feared the growing intrusion and cultural change. Under his direction, the "Red Sticks," most of whom came from Upper Creek towns, initiated a religious revival and resistance movement. They became followers of the Shawnee headman Tecumseh, who led a pan-tribal resistance movement against the U.S. Factionalism intensified as many Lower Creeks envisioned increased Euro-American acculturation as their future path while Upper Creeks sought a return to traditional political and cultural practices. Civil war erupted in 1812 between the "Red Sticks" and the opposing faction. The struggle escalated and became enveloped in the imperial War of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain. When the U.S. prevailed in the larger war, the federal government exerted its new power over North American territory and forced both their Creek allies and the "Red Sticks" to cede over twenty million

[15] Benjamin W. Griffith, *McIntosh and Weatherford: Creek Indian Leaders* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 11.

acres of land in Alabama and Georgia. This opened the floodgates of white settlers into former and extant Creek territory and sparked a new era of frontier violence. Virulent suspicion and hostility towards white men entering Creek land directly affected the federal government's continued efforts to "civilize" Creeks.[16]

Following the war, federal officials initiated new colonial policies that further upset Creek society. Thomas L. McKenney, who served as the superintendent of Indian trade from 1816 to 1822 and the Superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1824 to 1830, became the main architect of the U.S. civilization policy. He believed Native peoples had an aptitude for racial uplift and advocated for the establishment of a national Native American school system as an extension of the factory system. Though McKenney wanted a school system controlled exclusively by the federal government, Congress instead passed the Civilization Fund Act in 1819. This act provided for a $10,000 annual annuity to be allocated towards benevolent societies, which funded missionaries to establish schools among Native Americans. Providing schools for indigenous peoples under the auspices of the "civilization" program allowed the federal government to justify further land dispossession. Policy makers rationalized that they would provide Native Americans with "civilization" in exchange for land. Thus, they negotiated treaties to include funding for education as partial payment for land cessions. Federal officials hoped that missionaries sent to provide an English and Christian instruction, combined with labor training, would foster conversion, help Native peoples overcome perceived moral and economic deficiencies, and gradually undermine tribal

[16] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 76-85

structures. Missionaries, who viewed their work among Native Americans as a humanitarian effort, served as the agents of this imperial policy.[17]

Because local town chiefs still exercised a high degree of autonomy, they did not respond uniformly to early missionaries. Nevertheless, even those open to experimenting with schools in their territory worked to ensure they would dictate the terms of such an arrangement. Still reeling from the loss of land in the Creek Civil War, leaders met the early efforts of missionaries sent to their territory with suspicion. In 1819, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent two Presbyterian ministers, Cyrus C. Byington and Cyrus C. Kingsbury, to propose the establishment of schools and the spread of the gospel. After meeting in council, the leaders rejected their proposal. Despite this initial rebuff, the Lower Creek leader Little Prince consented in 1821 to allow Methodist William Capers to open a school. Capers opened the Asbury Manual Labor School, on the Chattahoochee River near the town of Coweta and Fort Mitchell, Alabama. He built it according to the newly established model of manual labor education deemed the most effective way to implement "civilization" policy.[18] Classes commenced under the direction of Isaac Smith, on August 5, 1822, with between thirty and fifty students in attendance each term over the next several years.[19]

The same year, William Capers also met with Big Warrior, the Upper Creek leader, in council and proposed another mission. Though Big Warrior was open to such

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[17] Herman J. Viola, *Thomas L. McKenney: Architect of America's Early Indian Policy, 1816-1830* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981).

[18] Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 22-23.

[19] "1826 Schools (Creeks), Reverend Isaac Smith reports to John Crowell Progress of Asbury Mission, Creek Nation near Fort Mitchell," box 28, volume 53, Grant Foreman Collection, Gilcrease Museum, Tulsa, OK (hereafter cited as GM).

a school, he made it clear to Capers the proposed school would only be possible with the consent of the Creek people. In their negotiations, Big Warrior informed Capers that "Every Red man shall be left altogether free, to send his children to school, or not to send them, as he may please," indicating that education would be fully voluntary instead of forced. He also sought to stymy any attempts by the missionaries to take over Creek lands, declaring, "Only the Red people shall allow the teacher or teachers to use so much ground as may be necessary to raise bread or vegetables for themselves and the children with them."[20] Despite Big Warrior's negotiations with Capers, he ultimately agreed to allow Baptist missionary Reverend Lee Comprere of South Carolina to open Withington Mission near Tuckabatchee, the leading Upper Creek town.[21] The commencement of these two missions marked the first time town leaders permitted western-style schools within Creek country. Nevertheless, their permission was "neither hearty nor unanimous." Many remained suspicious of the missionaries' intentions.[22]

Historians and contemporaries have portrayed Lower Creeks as more accepting of Euro-American values, including private property accumulation, slaveholding, and education. Conversely, many have characterized Upper Creeks as more conservative and resistant to white cultural intrusion. These generalizations can be useful for understanding the tensions that pervaded their social and political structure during the

[20] Report Made Before the Bishops and South Carolina of the Episcopal Church, at their annual meeting, Held in Augusta, February 21, 1822, By William Capers Who had been appointed to attempt a Mission among the Indians, Georgetown, 1822. Hargrett Collection, GM.

[21] Zellar, *African Creeks*, 22-23. The location of Coweta as the site of the first mission school is significant. During the long eighteenth century, Coweta had exerted primacy over Creek towns as the Creek political configuration transformed from a loose collection of towns tied together by kinship to a polity in control over territory. During the early nineteenth century, Coweta had firmly secured its position as the leading Creek town. See Steven C. Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation, 1670-1763*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 8.

[22] West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama*, 368.

early nineteenth century, as well as the factions that emerged during the Creek Civil War. As Claudio Saunt suggests, however, dichotomously characterizing factions, especially in terms of assimilation and tradition "obscure[s] rather than clarify[ies] the tensions in Creeks society" and does not "reflect the real problems that Creeks confronted."[23] Membership in Upper and Lower towns did not necessarily indicate a desire for or resistance to western-style education. While it is true that many Upper Creeks resisted missionary influence, many Lower Creeks did as well. Moreover, hostility towards missionaries did not always directly coincide with opposition to schools.

Assumptions concerning "mixed blood" and "full blood" reactions to missionary education are just as misleading. Though it is true many scions from intermarried, families attended Asbury Mission, children with no Euro-American ancestry also attended the schools. At Asbury, for instance, a ten-year-old member of the Upper Creek town Sawolka converted to Christianity, took the name Samuel Checote, and regularly attended the school. Checote later became principal chief of the Creek Nation and a vocal promoter of education. At Withington Station, another "full-blood" boy who took the name John Davis became one of the most pious pupils in attendance. Cultural orientation, rather than town affiliation or blood quantum, serves as a more useful tool for understanding the various reactions to the new mission schools.

The proposals to teach Creek children English literacy appealed to those who had already adapted certain aspects of Euro-American culture for their own purposes.

[23] Saunt, *A New Order of Things*, 2. Saunt argues that "Creek mestizos had a profound and disruptive impact on Creek society" but that "culture and biology" are not linked. He attributes the correlation between mixed Euro-American and Creek ancestry and their growing embrace of Euro-American practices to a familiarity and comfort with "the market economy, coercive power, and race slavery." He is careful to point out, however, that many "mestizo" also rejected these ideas and practices.

They believed continuing to do so would prove advantageous in further economic and diplomatic relations with white Americans. Many, however, remained bitter over white intrusion into their communities and suspicious of the missionaries' efforts. No matter how benevolent the missionaries' intentions to secure salvation of Native American souls and provide education might have been, they were agents of imperialism in the early American republic and their work directly challenged many Creek customs.[24]

With the schools located directly in Creek territory, western-style education upset Creek society. In particular, Capers, Smith, and Compere's efforts to instill Euro-American gender norms in students ran counter to the students' expected roles. Traditionally, Creeks delegated agricultural work almost exclusively to women, while men hunted, engaged in warfare, and traded. Women, with the assistance of their daughters, cared for homes but worked the fields in the "Season when their Crops of Corn is growing," as well as gathering other food sources and wood. Females also performed light manufacturing including the production of nut oil and pottery. In the schools, however, teachers taught them chores based on the Euro-American model of female domesticity. This instruction limited their labor roles to household duties, such as sewing, weaving, cleaning, and cooking, while preventing them from participating in agriculture and light manufacturing. Conversely, males did not typically participate in agricultural labor.[25] At the Asbury and Withington schools, however, the boys performed agricultural labor in the evenings while the girls attended to "the domestic

[24] Rebecca McNulty Schreiber, "Education for Empire: Manual Labor, Civilization, and the Family in Nineteenth-Century American Missionary Education," (PhD diss., University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2002), 3-6.

[25] William Bartram, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians,* edited by Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 152-154.

duties of the family."[26] This directly challenged constructions of masculinity that shaped gender roles in Creek society and emerged as a key source of conflict between educators and families.

In addition to gender ideology, the missionaries' teachings posed a threat to slaveholding Creeks. Creeks became progressively reliant on slave labor in the emerging economic system by the 1820s. With this transition, affluent, slaveholding families adopted the ideology of black inferiority that shaped the broader social hierarchy of the American South. Their African American slaves and the Afro-Creek population more generally became the largest demographic of Christian converts at the missions. In 1826, a federal official who visited Asbury reported twenty-six converts in the mission – four whites, eight Creeks, and fourteen blacks.[27] Gary Zellar attributes this trend to the "role of cultural brokerage" exercised by African Creeks who lived between the Creek and white worlds. "As Christian translators, interpreters, and preachers, African Creeks exercised power that was rarely afforded them in the traditional Creek square ground" or among Southern whites.[28] Slaveholders feared this power and the potential spread of abolitionism would disrupt slaveholding practices and endanger their elite, economic status.

As racial hierarchy intensified in Creek territory and the American South, missions served as a place where beliefs and behaviors played a more central role than phenotypes. One student at the Asbury Mission, Henry Perryman, reportedly said in his prayers, "*Jesus Christ died for all.* – Iste Hadkee, Istee Charte, and Iste Lustee – the

[26] R.A. Blount, "Asbury Mission," *The Methodist Magazine 1826, Vol. IX*, 436.
[27] *The Methodist Magazine, 1827, Vol. X*, 131.
[28] Zellar, *African Creeks*, 31.

white man, the red man, and the black man."[29] This reflects the missionaries' teachings that African Americans, Native Americans, and those of mixed racial backgrounds could receive Christian salvation like white Americans. Moreover, this suggests that for the students, Christian beliefs could be blended into the multi-racial and multi-cultural Creek world around them. For others, however, this challenged an emerging racial hierarchy.

As such, the majority of Creeks continued to view the schools with suspicion during their first few years of operation. In the wake of growing social and political tension, suspicion often evolved into hostility. The Creek response to missionary education differed considerably from their Cherokee and Choctaw neighbors. Choctaw and Cherokee leaders collaborated with missionaries to a greater degree in order to expand schooling opportunities. Prominent families recruited missionaries to come and teach their children. For instance, the affluent Cherokee slave-owner James Vann invited Moravian missionaries to establish a school near his Diamond Hill plantation in 1800.[30] After the Creek leaders rejected their proposal to serve as missionaries in Creek country, Cyrus Kingsbury and Cyrus Byington worked among the Cherokees during the 1820s and then the Choctaws, with whom they spent the remainder of their lives.[31]

Although Cherokees and Choctaws joined forces with missionaries to provide their children with schools, an impetus for literacy in their native languages drove intellectual innovation from within their societies. The Cherokee blacksmith named Sequoyah famously completed a Cherokee syllabary, transforming Cherokee from an

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[29] R.A. Blount, "Asbury Mission," *The Methodist Magazine, 1826, Vol. IX*, 436.

[30] Tiya Miles, *House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 64-65.

[31] Richard Mize, "Kingsbury, Cyrus," Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, www.okhistory.org (accessed November 30, 2014).

oral language into a written one during the 1820s. The syllabary sparked a new era of literacy and intellectual life that became central to the Cherokee Nation during the nineteenth century. Newspapers, books, and Cherokee government documents became new mediums for communicating and disseminating information regarding all aspects of Cherokee life. The transformation also occurred rapidly as Cherokees quickly made writing an indigenous form of their own culture. Literary scholar James Parins suggests, "The syllabary became a gateway to a world of intellectual possibilities and had profound effects on the political, social, economic, and educational affairs of the Cherokee Nation that continue to this day."[32]

Meanwhile, Choctaw leaders hoped to create a new generation of formally educated leaders and explored ways to exert control over this process. In 1825, Choctaws negotiated a treaty with the federal government in which they agreed to a new educational opportunity for their children, one that would soon become available to other Southern indigenous nations. The Choctaw leaders conceded to the establishment of Choctaw Academy in Blue Springs, Kentucky, on a farm belonging to Congressman and future Vice President Richard M. Johnson. Under pressure from the federal government, state legislatures, and white intruders to cede their land, leaders wished to produce a young generation of educated leaders as a strategy to protect their

[32] James Parins, *Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation, 1820–1906* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), xiv; The Choctaw Nation also embraced literacy but not as immediately as the Cherokees did. Missionaries, rather than native Choctaws, adapted the spoken language into a written one, making it a foreign introduction to their culture. A handful of missionaries, including Byington and Kingsbury, worked to learn the Choctaw language with the aid of Choctaw interpreters. They translated the Bible into the language to aid their conversion efforts and in the process, created a Choctaw syllabary. Choctaw citizens, however, adopted their written language to use for their own purposes. By 1826, they drafted their first written constitution in their own language. By 1829, missionaries in the Choctaw schools used a number of texts to teach children in their own language. Thus, Choctaw literacy grew in tandem with the growing desire for schools in the 1820s and 1830s. See Jeff Fortney, "Robert M. Jones and the Choctaw Nation: Indigenous Nationalism in the American South," unpublished dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2014, 31; Kidwell, *Choctaws and Missionaries*, 89-90.

sovereignty. An alternative to missionary-led education, the school became the first national school for Native Americans in the United States. The Choctaw Nation largely funded the school but children from other Southern indigenous groups attended. Native leaders hoped these school children would display the level of acculturation achieved by their people, prove their equality with whites, and thwart further land cessions.[33] In the years that followed, Creek leaders became more open to this model of education, rather than the missionary schools in their territory.

No amount of accommodation and creative adaptation to "civilization," however, could negate the colonial framework that created uneven power relations between Creeks and the United States. From the beginning, the "civilization" program was a trap designed to undermine sources of tribal stability. Thus, as land-hungry white Americans flooded into Creek territory, they agitated for removal, despite finding all the trappings of "civilization" adopted by the Five Tribes. A small Creek minority believed emigrating to the West offered them economic opportunity, political autonomy, and escape from the turmoil that embroiled their homeland. On February 12, 1825, William McIntosh, the Coweta headman and leader of the Lower Creek faction during Creek Civil War, signed the Treaty of Indian Springs with the federal government. His supporters and he received $200,000 and land west of the Mississippi in exchange for large tracts of the Lower Creek land base in Georgia and Alabama. McIntosh, who signed the treaty without permission of the council, provoked the ire of a large majority who vehemently opposed unapproved land cessions. Because this was a crime punishable by death according to Creek laws, they executed McIntosh three months

[33] Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "The Choctaw Academy," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, V.6, No. 4, December 1928, 453.

later. In 1826, Upper Creek leaders Opothle Yahola and Menawa led a delegation to Washington D.C. They managed to nullify the fraudulent Treaty of Indian Springs and negotiate the Treaty of Washington to regain land in Alabama. Nevertheless, they were forced to surrender the land already given to the state of Georgia.[34]

Opothle Yahola and Menawa agreed to allocate $24,000 from the 1826 Treaty of Washington to support the education of youths. In November, the powerful Upper Creek leader Opothle Yahola escorted the first group of thirteen boys, including his eight-year-old son, to Choctaw Academy in Kentucky. Then in 1827, the federal government negotiated another treaty with the Creeks, which specifically designated annuity payments for education at the Choctaw Academy. The treaty stated, "five thousand dollars of this sum shall be applied, under the direction of the President of the United States, towards the education and support of children at the school in Kentucky."[35] Most of the students selected to attend were the most ambitious boys from the mission schools, who strongly desired the opportunities afforded by the school.

The Creek leaders expected the boys to excel in their studies, or they would forfeit their spot to other students. For instance, in 1828 a group of seven boys departed for the academy, despite the fact that only five were scheduled to do so. The Creek agent explained, "there was two others that plead so hard the nation concluded to send them & they thought perhaps it would be best for some that were there to return…they had understood that there was one or two that did not learn well—and thought it would be advisable to bring them home & put others in place of them." By 1830, the town

[34] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 86-97. For a detailed history of Creek Removal, see Green, *The Crisis of Indian Removal*, 85-90.

[35] "Treaty with the Creeks, 1877," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II*, ed. by Charles Joseph Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 285.

headmen had selected twenty-five boys to attend the school.[36] While these students attended Choctaw Academy, larger social and political concerns consumed Creek country.

Along with the Creeks' land base and political sovereignty, the very fabric of their society seemed to unravel as the removal process began. In February of 1828, a party of over seven hundred McIntosh followers and their slaves arrived at Fort Gibson under the direction of McIntosh's son Chilly McIntosh. They experienced a difficult journey and continued to face challenges once they arrived, including high rates of disease. Removal continued as dispossessed Creeks from Alabama and Georgia, the majority from Lower Creek towns, travelled west to join the McIntosh party in Indian Territory. In late 1828, another group of approximately four hundred emigrated, and then an even larger group of about 1,200 followed in 1829.[37] The emigrants faced the arduous tasks of rebuilding their society in a foreign land. Many McIntosh followers were affluent and culturally progressive members of Coweta town, who desired their children to have educational opportunities in the west. Upon arrival, some sent their children to Union Mission, which also served the Osages and the Cherokees who had relocated to the region. Within two years, approximately thirty Creek children attended the school, including "several young men of promise of the lately arrived Creeks."[38]

As the fear that all Creeks would be forced relocated to Indian Territory grew, some envisioned education as central to survival and progress in the west. John Davis,

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[36] Many of them came from prominent families of mixed Creek and Euro-American heritage that had sent children outside of Creek country for schooling since that late eighteenth century. Others, however, came from families with no Euro-American kin connections. For instance, Goliath Herrod, a "full-blood" Creek boy, spent several years at the Academy and then rejoined his family. Carolyn Foreman, "Choctaw Academy," 468.

[37] Green, *The Crisis of Indian Removal*, 141-174.

[38] "Vail to General Sam Houston," box 35, volume 74, pgs. 252-253, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

the most promising pupil and recent convert at Withington Station, wrote Captain Walker expressing his desire for future schooling. He requested that missionaries be allowed to emigrate west and that additional treaty annuities be allocated towards schools. Davis petitioned that the "government would provide sufficient means as to move our Missionaries with us and allow us mechanicks [sic] with them and enlarge the missionary schools for the improvement of our people."[39]

Whereas Creeks in the west embraced schools as a part of their new territory, those remaining in the east intensified their hostility towards missionaries. Just as many had feared, missionary educators had served as a harbinger for further Euro-American colonization of their lands but the missions also posed another serious threat. With the parties leaving for the west, kinship groups splintered and towns uprooted. This left the very social and political existence of Creek identity in jeopardy. As many parents feared, exposure to Christianity, English literacy, and Euro-American social customs in the mission schools could isolate children from their kinship networks and interfere with familial and social obligations. Subsequently, antagonism towards missionaries intensified as Creeks struggled to preserve families. Disturbances at Withington Station and Asbury Mission can best be understood as a microcosm for the larger patterns of violence and political turmoil encapsulated in the removal crisis.

One episode at Asbury Mission reveals the deep fractures in kinship networks caused by missionary influence and compounded by removal. In 1828, Jane Hill, a teacher at the school, wrote a letter to Thomas McKenney pleading with him to advise her in a delicate matter. She found herself in a struggle with the family of one of her

[39] John Davis to Thomas McKenney, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy, M234, roll 221, slide 699.

pupils, eighteen-year-old Mary Ann Battis. Mary Ann's blend of African, European, and Native American ancestry compounded the situation. Hill wrote, "Her mother is the daughter of a black woman her grandfather was half white and half Creek. Mary Ann's father was white and she is the fairest female I have seen in this nation." Though Mary Ann appeared white to her teacher, Battis's mother and maternal uncles, rather than her white father, decided the course of her schooling and her future.[40]

This was hardly the first battle for control with this family. More than a year earlier, according to Hill, "her relations (who are nearly all of them extremely dark people & her mother has some children who have black fathers) threatened to take her from the mission." Mary Ann pleaded with them to allow her to "remain among the white people." At the time, her mother consented but changed her mind in 1828 when her family was among the first groups to immigrate to Indian Territory. Mary Ann's uncle "who seemed to have the principle control of his sister's affairs" ordered her to leave the mission and go "with him in the night to stay." When Mary Ann refused, her mother, who had no intention of relinquishing familial control over her daughter, reportedly threatened her with "tying and whipping," and then took her home.[41]

Mary Ann once again thwarted her family's wishes and returned to the mission. The young woman remained there under the guardianship of the white missionaries while her family emigrated west. She then married a white man. Her fair complexion, which differed from her darker skinned family members, aided Mary Ann in passing in white society. Her immersion into Christianity, education, and Euro-American cultural

[40] Jane Hill to Thomas McKenney, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy, M234, roll 221, M234, slide 821-822.

[41] Jane Hill to Thomas McKenney, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy, M234, roll 221, slide 821-822.

habits at the Asbury school also separated her from her family. In many ways, Battis's decision to remain in Alabama embodied Creek fears that colonial policies would further fracture their society, tear apart kinship groups, and eradicate central practices and beliefs.

Like matrilineal relatives, local town leaders also sought to limit these negative consequences by exerting careful oversight over the care of the pupils in the two mission schools throughout the 1820s. In 1828, for instance, the Lower Creek leader Little Prince expressed satisfaction with the progress of the Asbury school:

> I, Tustinuggee Hopaie, or Little Prince, headman of this Creek Nation, certify that I reside in the immediate neighborhood of the Asbury Missionary School, in this Nation, and so far as I am informed, the conduct of those who have charge of this institution has been perfectly satisfactory, and I have no cause of complaint. The children seem to be satisfied and say they are kindly treated.

He also attended the examinations of the school to ensure that the children received proper instruction.[42] While exercising supervision and ensuring the missionaries did not interfere with his political authority, Little Prince made sure the mission school in his local community operated on his terms.

Although town leaders like Little Prince decided to what degree they would accommodate missionaries, hostility towards the educators became more pronounced as the threat of removal deepened. Both Upper and Lower Creek leaders prohibited Comprere and Capers from preaching. The ban stemmed from the fear that missionaries would erode the Creeks' culture and cause uprisings among their slaves. John Davis noted, "The chiefs do not listen to the view of the government and they try to walk in their old way – though they know we have no laws to prevent white people

[42] "Little Prince's commendation of the missionaries," printed in Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama*, 375.

when they are determined to injure us."[43] Yet, the town leaders continued to try to suppress the cultural and spiritual influences of whites among them, hoping to prevent further cultural destruction and land cessions. As Baptist missionary Lee Comprere wrote in 1828, many of the Creeks demonstrated some "opposition to the preaching of the gospel, especially to the poor unfortunate black people." The leading men allocated harsh punishments for attending outlawed worship services, and since African Creeks comprised the majority of converts, they bore the brunt of these punishments.[44]

One particularly violent reprisal reveals a complex web of racial and gender relations within Creek society. In May 1828, a group of about twenty-five men demonstrated their opposition to the activities of the missionaries at Withington Station. While Lee Comprere's family and a group of Afro-Creeks worshipped in the mission, a cohort of Creek men "burst into every room" and ransacked the building "under the pretense of searching for the black people." Upon finding the black converts, the men "tied them with cords and belts" and then "led them out one by one fastened them to a post in the yard, where they beat them unmercifully." They discovered a twelve-year-old girl among the worshippers. After forcing her to watch the "sufferings of others," the men "led her like the rest to the fatal post, turned up her clothes and tied them fast around her neck." They beat her and then sexually assaulted her with "licentious examinations."[45]

[43] John Davis to Thomas McKenney, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy M234, roll 221, slide 699.

[44] Zellar, *African Creeks*, 22-23.

[45] Lee Comprere to Thomas McKenney, May 20, 1828, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Creek Agency, 1824-1876, microcopy, M234, roll 221, slide 703.

Though disturbing, this incident serves as one example of the violence that encapsulated Native peoples in the North American system of settler colonialism.[46] Creeks, like other Native peoples, reshaped themselves as they became more and more entangled in the imperial framework of North America. These transformations often resulted in new patterns of violence, including frontier warfare, Native American slavery, and the exploitation of women. It is important to uncover the deeper layers of social and political meaning behind the beatings and sexual assault at the mission school and to understand the broader context in which it occurred.

The attack on Withington Stations was hardly an isolated case in Creek country. On the local level, town headmen who opposed white intrusion exerted their authority over those who defied laws against Christian worship. Although Comprere claimed the local leader Yarghee had assured him that he had no objection to his people receiving instruction in the mission, Yarghee's men carried out the assault. Not long before, rumors circulated that another town leader, who publicly opposed Christianity, had authorized a "disturbance of the black people," who belonged to a small congregation that Comprere occasionally led in worship.[47] The nature of the violent attacks on Afro-Creek converts revealed the deep level of animosity toward interference in spiritual, cultural, and social practices. Missionaries threatened the power relations structuring Creek society, including the leaders' authority.

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[46] Ned Blackhawk contends that, while historians have largely omitted violence from their interpretations of American history, it is a critical framework for understanding the role of indigenous peoples within the narrative. He suggests that although violence predates colonial contact, the transition from imperial contestation to nation-state formation allowed "violence and American nationhood" to progress "hand in hand." At times, Native Americans adapted in ways that cannot be "celebrated or glorified."Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 9, 6.

[47] Lee Comprere to Thomas McKenney, May, 20, 1828, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Creek Agency, 1824-1876, microcopy, M234, roll 221, slide 703.

Comprere continued to believe erroneously that the federal government could squelch the authority of the Creek leaders and protect his mission. In August 1828, he appealed to the Creek agent John Crowell. When asked to send a list of damages caused by the violent incident at the mission, Comprere wrote, "If I were to fix a price on the damages done to the happiness of my family, money would not pay it for from that day to this they have not felt secure in Indian country and our affairs have been derailed by it." Comprere, however, issued a larger demand. He informed Crowell that he would forget the matter if the agent would implore the council to give full "permission to their people to attend religious worship, both Indians and negroes." With a thinly veiled threat, he explained that if he could not accomplish this, then "it will be in vain to think of staying among them," and he would entreat the Creeks to pay damages for all the improvements he had made at the mission.[48]

Despite Comprere's belief that his Christian imperative and the political authority of the federal government would override the Creeks' power to sanction his activities, his plan did not come to fruition. The punishments for Christian worship continued and the presence of missionaries became more and more tenuous. Less than a year after the violent incident, *The Missionary Herald* reported, "At Withington Station, among the Creeks, the state of things is discouraging, owing to the violent persecutions of the natives. Its abandonment seems inevitable." Shortly after, Comprere closed Withington Station and fled the territory.[49] Within months, the

[48] Lee Comprere to John Crowell, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Creek Agency, 1824-1876, microcopy, M234, roll 221.

[49] American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. 1829. *The Missionary Herald* (Boston: Published for the Board by Samuel T. Armstrong), 196, 42.

Methodists also closed Asbury Mission and these early experiments with schools in Creek country reached an unsuccessful end.

The ongoing conflict surrounding these mission schools highlight the relations of power embedded in interactions between the various racial groups in the American South. The master-slave relationship lay at the heart of these power relations. Affluent and powerful Creeks adopted a system of chattel slavery based on racial ideology while African Americans and Afro-Creeks became increasingly marginalized within their society. Although some historians assert that slaves belonging to Native American slaveholders enjoyed a much larger degree of autonomy than African American slaves belonging to white masters, the harsh physical punishments for learning from missionaries indicate that Native American slaveholding was still an oppressive institution that restricted the agency of its victims.[50] Slaves' continual efforts to challenge their masters' wishes and the chiefs' authority at the risk of intense retribution highlights one way in which they exercised agency and resisted their subjugated status.

[50] Some historians argue that slavery in Native American societies continued along the lines of traditional captivity practices in which the status of being unfree was not necessarily permanent or based on heredity. Indian captives often had high degrees of autonomy and were subject to less exploitative labor practices. For examples of this see Theda Perdue, *Slavery and the Evolution of Cherokee Society, 1540-1866* (Chattanooga: University of Tennessee Press, 1987) and Donna Akers, *Living in the Land of the Dead* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004). In *African Creeks*, Gary Zellar builds on this interpretation. He argues that fluid definitions of Creek identity mitigated harsh slaveholding practices and race based marginalization in Creek society. Several scholars offer countering interpretations of slavery and race among the Five Tribes. Christina Snyder argues that by the early nineteenth century Southern Indians developed a unique form of racial slavery that combined traditional captivity practices with an increasing ideology of black inferiority as they transitioned from being primarily slave traders to slaveholders. See Snyder, *Slavery in Indian Country*. Tiya Miles, Fay Yarbrough, and Barbara Krauthammer also argue that race based slavery, racial difference, and racial codification became central to economic, social, and political structures among Southern Indians. See Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006); Fay A. Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Barbara Krauthamer *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation, and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). For the Creeks, Claudio Saunt argues in *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) that although racial identities remained fluid among the Creek during the colonial period, by the nineteenth century they became increasingly rigid.

Like the slaves of white masters, Creek slaves' efforts to receive religious instruction and literacy from missionaries posed a challenge to their unfree status. In the study *Self Taught*, which examines African Americans' struggle for educational opportunities in the antebellum South, Heather Andrea Williams suggests, "the very act of learning to read and write subverted the master-slave relationship." She argues "once literate, many used this hard-won skill to disturb the power relations between master and slave, as they fused their desire for literacy with their desire for freedom."[51] Collectively, literate slaves could rebel and overthrow the entire social order in the Creek Nation and more broadly the American South. Literacy opened the doors to freedom, and powerful Creek masters fully understood this "crucial link between literacy and freedom" and used violence to suppress it.[52]

The violence sparked by the early Creek mission schools, however, cannot be understood simply as bilateral tension between Creek masters and African American slaves. Instead, the structures of American colonialism and their principal agents—white missionaries and federal officials—must be inserted into the equation. As Tiya Miles suggests, "British and American colonization in the Southeast led to the introduction of African American slavery and racial prejudice" among Southern Native groups. She explains that the Cherokees "adopted racial slavery in part to demonstrate their level of "civilization" in the hopes of forestalling further encroachment by white America." Like the Cherokees, many powerful Creeks advocated the enslavement and marginalization of African Americans within their society in order to exercise economic independence, assert political autonomy, and perhaps most importantly, differentiate

[51] Heather Andrea Williams, *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 7.

[52] Williams, *Self Taught,* 8.

themselves from the subjugated African race.[53] These practices intensified during the 1820s and 1830s as the federal government pressured Southern indigenous nations to make land cessions. The incident at Withington Station and other similar cases demonstrate the intertwined efforts to simultaneously resist federal Indian policies and subjugate African Americans. In Creek country, mission schools became a nexus for these entangled developments.

Equally complicated power dynamics emerged when some parents continued to seek educational opportunities for their children through connections with influential white Americans. For instance, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Thomas McKenney, fostered two boys in the late 1820s after promising their family and friends that he would "see to their education and good treatment." Under his care, William Barnard and Lee Comprere (named after the Baptist missionary) attended school in Georgetown.[54] McKenney, the architect of the "civilization program," strongly believed in the aptitude of Native Americans for education and sought to invest personally in their schooling. Previously, he fostered Chickasaw Daugherty Colbert and Choctaw James L. McDonald, the first Native American to earn a law degree. In 1830, Andrew Jackson ordered McKenney to step down from his position as Superintendent of Indian Affairs because he disagreed with McKenney's assessment that Native peoples had the same intellectual and moral capacity as white Americans. As a result, the two Creek boys found themselves at the center of conflict over federal authority.

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[53] Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2006), 4.

[54] "1830 Schools, President of the U.S. (Relative to Two Creek boys in Georgetown)," box 48, vol. 54, 162-163, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

McKenney, who planned to depart for New York, struggled to keep them under his care, while the War Department claimed them as wards. The boys appealed directly to President Jackson explaining, "He [McKenney] is our friend we love him and he is good to us. Do not, father, let us be taken away from him…We come to see our father with this talk – we hope he will not deny us what we came for." Despite the boys' wishes and their parents' desires, Jackson instructed them to stay in Georgetown instead of going with their guardian.[55] Unlike the family of Mary Ann Battis, these boys' parents sought for them to receive an education. Yet, the President exercised his authority to encroach on the families' wishes and dictate the terms of their education.

Jackson's interference with Comprere and Barnard reflect the intrusive policies enacted during his administration. After the 1830 Indian Removal Act gave him the authority to remove Southeastern indigenous nations from their lands, federal officials negotiated a series of treaties with the Five Tribes, beginning with the Choctaws who signed the Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830. Although an overwhelming majority of Southern Natives opposed removal, the pressure from the federal government and land hungry Euro-Americans placed them in a desperate situation. The Creeks, already fractured between their traditional homelands and the new settlement in the West, attempted to resist removal. The leaders used formal political strategies, issuing a public appeal to the citizens of Alabama and Georgia and voting in council to remain in their homeland under the jurisdiction of those states. Meanwhile, those being pushed from their land resorted to violent resistance to counteract this pressure. Nevertheless, Upper Creek leaders, headed by the powerful Opothle Yahola, signed the

[55] "1830 Schools, President of the U.S. (Relative to Two Creek boys in Georgetown)," box 48, vol. 54, 162-163, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

Removal Treaty on March 24, 1832. Two more parties departed for Indian Territory in 1834 and 1835. Conditions worsened for those remaining in Alabama as violent encounters culminated in the Second Creek War. Resistance provided Jackson with the justification to remove those who remained in Alabama. After Opothle Yahola led a large party to Indian Territory, Jackson then ordered those who remained to be chained and marched to Indian Territory by U.S. Army soldiers.[56]

The contradictions entrenched in federal Indian policy hindered the effectiveness of "civilization" policy. Implementing the removal policy caused social and political turmoil among the Creeks. This, in turn, made the continued function of the missions impossible as operations were impeded "by the unsettled state of the Indians and their emigration to the west." As early as 1827, the Methodists who operated Asbury Mission reported that, "[d]uring the past year, the removal of so many Indians as resided on the lands lately ceded to the state of Georgia has increased this difficulty much beyond what had formerly existed."[57] Within two years, Asbury and Withington closed, and the missionaries fled from the high levels of hostility they had experienced over the past few years. Removal not only undermined the ideological underpinnings of "civilization," but in the case of the Creeks, it also encumbered the tangible implementation of "civilization" policy on the local level.

Creeks' resistance differed considerably from the Cherokees and Choctaws' congenial relations with missionaries. The Five Tribes' divergent relationships with missionaries not only influenced individual removal experiences but also set precedents for the role of missionaries in the various post-removal nations. White missionaries

[56] Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal,* 174-186.
[57] *The Methodist Magazine, 1827, Vol. X,* 131.

who had resided in the Cherokee and Choctaw Nations and collaborated with leaders to provide education actively lobbied against removal. Missionary Samuel Austin Worcester, for example, ardently defended Cherokee sovereignty. In an attempt to prevent Worcester and other missionaries from inciting resistance to removal, the state of Georgia passed a law prohibiting white missionaries from residing among the Cherokees. Worcester defied the law, went to prison, and then represented the interests of the Cherokee Nation before the Supreme Court.[58] In the landmark 1831 *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* case, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall established the ward relationship between indigenous polities and the United States government. In the subsequent 1832 case *Worcester v. Georgia*, however, Marshall redefined the status of Native tribes. He ruled that they are "considered as distinct, independent political communities, retaining their natural rights as the undisputed possessors of the soil, from time immemorial."[59] Andrew Jackson refused to enforce the ruling. Removal continued, but the case provided Native peoples with a legal claim to political sovereignty.

Creeks, however, had pushed out the Baptists and Methodists and did not have missionary allies during the removal crisis. The different types of relationships forged between evangelists and the Creek, Cherokee and Choctaw Nations, shaped the degree to which these nations collaborated with missionaries immediately after removal. For the Cherokees and Choctaws, education became a key part of the rebuilding process as those relocated Native peoples slowly pieced their lives and communities back together

[58] Richard Mize, "Worcester, Samuel Austin," Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, www.okhistory.org (accessed November 30, 2014).

[59] "Worcester v. Georgia, 1832." See Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Documents of United States Indian Policy, 3rd edition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 60.

and attempted to build stronger, independent nations. As they had before removal, Cherokee and Choctaw leaders continued to collaborate with missionaries. In Indian Territory, however, they took control of the schools among their people and established elaborate national systems of education.[60] Meanwhile, the majority of Creeks remained resistant to missionary efforts and hesitant to embrace western-style education. After all, the widespread adaptation of education and other Euro-American practices among Cherokees and Choctaws had not prevented white intruders colonizing their land and their forced removal from Creek homelands.

Despite earlier failures, a handful of missionaries followed Creeks to Indian Territory and worked to establish new mission schools. The Lower Creek leader Roley McIntosh consented to these efforts. In 1832, Baptists sent David Lewis and Isaac McCoy, who had previously taught at Withington Station, to Indian Territory to assist Christians in their proselytizing. They established the Muscogee Baptist Church in September, and after quickly gaining a following of predominantly African Creeks, they built a small schoolhouse. Although they attracted converts and students, the majority of the new arrivals remained highly suspicious and hostile towards them. [61] The same year, John Fleming, a recent Princeton graduate, received an appointment from the ABCFM to do mission work with direct instructions to produce a textbook in the Muskogee language. He and his wife reached Indian Territory in January 1833, and

[60] For more on early education among the Cherokees see Devon Mihusuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Champagne-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); *James Parins, Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation, 1820–1906* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013); William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the Early Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 350-36. McLoughlin also highlights the role of missionaries in Cherokee education by tracing the careers of Evan and John B. Jones who served the Cherokees for fifty years in *Champions of the Cherokees: Evan and John B. Jones* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[61] Zellar, *African Creeks*, 27.

began their work at Union Mission. Upon his arrival, he wrote to his mother that while he learned the language, "Margaret will teach school if she can get the Indians to send their children. But they are very slow to do this."[62] He too, initially struggled to make inroads in the local community.

Fleming only gained marginal success when he enlisted the help of an educated Creek. James Perryman was the young son of the prominent town headman and McIntosh supporter, Benjamin Perryman. According to Fleming, Perryman had "by his own exertions learned to read & now desired strong to learn the art of writing." He was already a practiced interpreter and offered his aid to the failing preacher. The number of children attending the Union Mission gradually increased, and Fleming learned to read and write Muskogee and translate it into English. He accomplished his task of producing a small language textbook called *The Children's Volume.* When the Cherokee missionary Samuel Worcester established a printing press at Union Mission, this volume became the first printed book in Indian Territory in 1835.[63] Fleming faced continual hostility as he carried out this work.

Creeks, however, did not oppose education writ large. Instead, they feared outside intrusion into their practices and continued harassment of their people by so-called messengers of God. The American Board of Foreign Missions Annual report for 1833 stated, Creeks remained "strongly prejudiced against Christianity" despite being "very desirous of having their children educated."[64] More culturally conservative

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[62] John Fleming to Mary Fleming, January 1833, box 12, folder 11, Foreman Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society (hereafter cited as OHS).

[63] Muriel Wright, "Notes on the Life of Mrs. Hannah Worcester Hicks Hitchcock and the Park Hill Press, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Volume 19, No. 4, December, 1941, 348.

[64] "American Board of Foreign Missions, 24th Annual Report," box 35, vol. 74, pg. 311, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

families feared that the spread of Christianity among the population would erode traditional cultural practices already disrupted by removal. Affluent, slaveholding Creeks worried that missionaries would incite slave resistance and racial conflict; plus, the fact that the missionaries were predominantly from Northern states and abolitionist strongholds only deepened their concern. Collectively, leaders mitigated the influence of missionaries and dictated the terms of their activities, just as they had done prior to removal.

Fleming, whose scholars included "black and red," encountered this first hand. He wrote, "The first chief assaulted me one day with a great fury for teaching their slaves and said it was contrary to their laws, but when he'd convinced himself that I knew the law as well as he did upon that point, he became apparently calm and rode off. But I deemed it prudent that I should cease to educate the slaves which I did."[65] Even after he stopped teaching slaves, Fleming continued to struggle. Three and a half years after his arrival, he admitted that he had "spent considerable funds of the Church" but had "accomplished little."[66]

Hostilities between Creeks and white missionaries reached a boiling point in 1836 after the final removal party under the leadership of Opothle Yahola arrived in Indian Territory. Although the leaders and federal officials expressed concern about the factions reuniting peacefully, an unfortunate incident allowed them to come together and make a bilateral agreement concerning missionaries. A Methodist teacher named John Irwin reportedly "imposed himself" on one of the Creeks' "most respectable

[65] Rev. John Fleming to David Green (ABC 73 #50), Western Creek Nation, Ft. Gibson, Oct. 2, 1833, box 16, folder 8, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

[66] Rev. John Fleming to David Green, August 10, 1836, box 16, folder 8, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

women" and "seduced her by his strong diabolical passion," causing her to become pregnant with his child. Subsequently, members of the McIntosh party and recently arrived members of Upper Towns assembled at Fort Gibson where they decided to expel all of the missionaries from their nation.[67] They wrote a petition to General William Arbuckle on August 31, 1836, demanding the removal of missionaries. After citing Irwin's crime, the petition accused missionaries of "encouraging our slaves by teaching them and telling them they should be free." The petitioners explained that the long presence of missionaries among the Creek people had "proved to be the most ruinous in nature, both to the nation and to individuals."[68]

In light of the missionaries' transgressions, the Creek Council's order of expulsion went into effect immediately. Superintendent of the Western Superintendency, William Armstrong, supported the leaders' decision and issued an order instructing the missionaries to leave the Creek Nation. Disgusted with the situation, he explained that he found Irwin's actions "revolting to the sacred Missionary cause." Armstrong recognized the volatility of the situation and feared Creeks would seek retribution if the missionaries attempted to remain. Directing them not to incite further trouble, he warned, "your situation is not safe." He also wrote to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, C.A. Harris, to justify his decision as a necessary precaution. Backing the council, Armstrong stressed that he had "no doubt of the truth," including the charges against Irwin.[69]

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[67] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance,* 118.

[68] "Creek chiefs to General William Arbuckle, August 31, 1836," box 29, vol. 57, pg. 481, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

[69] "William Armstrong to C.A. Harris," box 29, vol. 57, pg. 504, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

The Creek leaders asserted the authority to control activities within the bounds of their sovereign territory, a power guaranteed to them in the removal treaty. Over the next few years, Isaac McCoy, John Fleming, and other expelled missionaries repeatedly appealed to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to permit their return. Harris sympathized with the missionaries, but William Armstrong and the new agent J.W.A. Sanford pointed out the failure of the missionaries to carry out the humanitarian goals of "civilization" policy. Moreover, they emphatically defended the Creeks' authority. After investigating, Sanford concluded, "Under the circumstances, I cannot but consider it an ungracious attempt to extort acquiescence by threats of authoritative interference from the Department…which would by this means obtrude itself upon the people with no other prospect of respect than the dreaded power of Government."[70] Unlike policymakers in Washington D.C., both Armstrong and Sanford had a better understanding of social and political affairs on the local level. They recognized that only a few months after forced removal, further federal intrusion would only incite violent resistance. Though the expulsion of missionaries ran counter to the federal government's "civilization" program, the Creek leaders successfully resisted colonial policies with the assistance of federal officials on the ground.

In addition to ousting the missionaries, the Creek Council also attempted to prevent further Christian influence by ordering lashes for anyone--Creek citizen or slave--who attended worship services. Even with the official rejection of Christianity, a growing number of Creeks and slaves integrated Christianity into their spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. Though they faced harsh punishments, Christians continued to

[70] J.W.A Sanford to William Armstrong, July 5, 1837, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy, M234, School files, roll 778.

worship in secret, forge syncretic practices, and spread the gospel among their resistant brethren. Perhaps most well-known among them was the Baptist preacher John Davis, who attended Withington Station before removal. Davis, an ardent advocate of both Christianity and education, had previously proselytized among his people and hoped to lift the ban.[71]

Even as leaders rejected white Christian influence, interest in secularly controlled education within the bounds of the nation increased. As Davis explained, the "prejudice against preaching exists among the people" but "anxiety of the people for schools is increasing."[72] Davis, who desired schools, attended council to urge the Creek agent to establish schools, and the leaders agreed to create a government school at North Fork. In his annual report on schools in the Western Superintendency, William Armstrong described the ongoing situation: "They are opposed to anything like religion and only lately would they agree for a school being located amongst them. One is preparing to go into operation on the Arkansas. It is also contemplated to establish another on the Canadian." The council, however, set strict parameters for these government schools, insisting on "a judicious selection of teachers and proper management." Armstrong hoped that if the federal government would comply with the council's wishes and allow them to adopt education on their own terms, only then would "the prejudices of the Creeks will be removed."[73]

Taking control of education out of the hands of missionaries and making it the responsibility of the agent and "government teachers" still meant that Creeks had to rely

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[71] Debo, *Road to Disappearance*, 117-118.

[72] "Extract from a letter of Rev. John Davis, Native Preacher, North Fork, Creek Nation," March 12, 1839, box 35, vol. 74, pg. 126, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

[73] Report on Schools in the Western Superintendency, 1837, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy, M234, School files, roll 778, Slide 62, 64.

on white Americans to lead their schools. Constant scandals sparked fears among some, especially conservative followers of Opothle Yahola, that this system still contained insufficient safeguards against colonial abuse. Their fears were not groundless. One of the government teachers, Dr. Anderson, led a failing school and then went to prison after being exposed as a counterfeiter, a crime for which he subsequently tried to implicate the Creeks.[74] Another teacher, Mr. Mason, who had been approved to staff the North Fork school, became a target of opposition. On a walk one day near his home, three or four men crossed his path. One called out to shoot, and Mason felt a bullet enter his chest, passing about two inches from his heart. Another man then drew a large bowie knife and pursued him as he retreated into the thicket. Mason, who narrowly escaped, attributed the incident to "the improper conduct of some who call themselves missionaries." Fearing for the safety of his family, he reported the episode to the agent, who then accompanied him to make a formal complaint to several Creek leaders. Apparently, they offered little protection because Mason continued to feel in jeopardy. He wrote, "I cannot step out of doors without danger of being shot…When we lie down at night we fear the house will be burned down." He arranged to flee with his family.[75]

Indiscretions in schools led to hostility and even violence as Creeks negotiated the permanent presence of white teachers. Yet leaders remained open to considering schools if teachers would guarantee to abide by rules set by the council. An opportunity arose in 1841 when, at the behest of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions,

[74] Robert M. Loughridge, "History of Mission Work Among the Creek Indians from 1832 to 1888 Under the Direction of the Board of Foreign Missions Presbyterian Church in the U.S.S.," typescript manuscript, Folder 1, Robert M. Loughridge Collection, OHS, 4.

[75] "Mason Account," box 35, vol. 74, folder 3, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

Reverend Robert Loughridge traveled from his home in Alabama to Indian Territory. He went "to ascertain whether they were willing to receive missionaries and have a school established among them."[76] After making the six hundred-mile journey on horseback, he presented two letters, one from Armstrong and one directly from the War Department recommending his mission to Chief Roley McIntosh. After three weeks, the leaders met in council to consider his proposal. According to Loughridge, McIntosh explained: "We want a school, but we don't want preaching; for we find that preaching breaks up all our old customs—our feasts, ball plays, and dances—which we want to keep up."[77] Then, Loughridge wrote, "[a]fter considerable discussion, the Chiefs proposed that if I would establish a school, I might preach at the schoolhouse, and nowhere else."[78]

Once again, the Creek leaders dictated the terms of education within their territory and restricted the ability of missionaries to evangelize among their citizens. It is possible Loughridge's strong southern upbringing helped ease the council members' fears that he would incite uprising among their slaves. Loughridge had no choice but acquiesce to McIntosh's terms. He made the journey back to Alabama, married a young woman named Olivia Hill, and returned to establish the mission on February 5, 1843. Roley McIntosh welcomed him and dictated the mission would be located in his Lower Creek town, Coweta, located twenty-five miles from Fort Gibson in the Arkansas District, where a vacant cabin was already available for use. Loughridge and his new bride occupied the cabin for a year while he hired laborers to construct a log building with seven rooms to serve as both the school and house of worship. Upon

[76] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work," 4.
[77] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work," 6.
[78] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work," 6.

completion, Olivia Loughridge, an experienced educator, began to teach between fifteen and twenty local Coweta children while her husband led the church.[79]

The average number of pupils reached thirty-five within the first two years. Initially, however, only children in or near Coweta town had access to the school. After a short period, parents from other parts of the nation petitioned Loughridge to board their children if they agreed to pay their expenses. Eight children lived with the missionaries during the first term and within a year, the number doubled. Even though boarding students provided a greater number of children with educational opportunity, only a slim demographic of children attended the school during the 1840s. Many members of the Coweta town were affluent Creeks of mixed Native and Euro-American ancestry. Those families who sent their children from other towns were also among the affluent who had accumulated enough material wealth to pay for schooling.[80]

Coweta town members sent their children to the school to learn to read and write, but they remained "devotedly attached to their old customs and superstitions." Unlike previous missionaries who openly defied the terms of their agreements with the town leaders, Loughridge adhered to their wishes and did not proselytize outside of the mission. He encountered increased interest in schooling and found "[m]any of the Creeks manifest much anxiety about the education of their children."[81] With this cooperation from Loughridge, the leaders began accept education without enacting the violent sanctions experienced by missionaries before removal.[82]

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[79] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work," 6-8.

[80] Robert Loughridge to James Logan, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1845*, 603-604.

[81] "Robert Loughridge to James Logan," box 38, vol. 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

[82] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work," 8.

The growing interest in education also coincided with a period of relaxation in the leadership's hostility toward Christianity. Although the laws against Christian worship and the punishments of fifty lashes remained in place, the number of Christians expanded. By 1845, the members of Methodist churches reached 550 and the number of Baptists rose to nearly 600.[83] With the absence of white missionaries, this trend was truly homegrown. Creek preachers - including John Davis, Samuel Checote, and others who had converted before removal - began proselytizing among their own people. Although some town leaders continued to fear the spread of abolitionism through Christian religion among slaves, many recognized that Christianity could be integrated into Creek society rather than supplant it. Neither Christianity nor education necessarily negated the customs and practices that shaped society, though they had proven disruptive in the past and certainly influenced social change. While the number of Christian converts and educated citizens increased, communal land, town organization, kinship networks, busk ceremonies, and other cultural traditions central to Creek life persisted.

For Christian Creeks, this shift offered hope that Christianity and education would became permanent facets of the already culturally diverse Creek society. As a group of educated Christian citizens wrote in 1845, "We are happy to see much of the opposition that has so long existed now dying away and we cherish a fond hope that the time is not far distant when Education and religion will be free in our Nation."[84] Their desires soon became a reality when in 1848 Chief Roley McIntosh officially ended the sanctions against Christianity at a camp meeting at which several leaders and Baptist

[83] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 120.
[84] "Letter from Creek citizens," box 38, vol. 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

Creeks gathered. During the preceding decade, the number of Christian Creeks and Christian preachers had increased considerably despite their prohibition.[85] The new openness towards Christianity and education provided new opportunities for Creeks to collaborate with missionaries in the years that followed. Educated Christian Creeks also became leading advocates for schools in towns throughout the nation in the 1840s. These shifts marked a clear turning point in the development of Creek-controlled education.

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Creeks' early experiences with schools in their territory between 1820 and 1840 proved volatile. Missionary education and the broader "civilization" program posed a threat to many aspects of Creek society, including gender roles, slaveholding, matrilineal kinship, spiritual practices, and political authority. These disruptions escalated within the larger crisis of American colonization and forced removal, leading to violence and turmoil that tore at the seams of Creek society. Afterward, Creeks remained antagonistic toward white missionary educators even as their Cherokee and Choctaw neighbors more willingly adapted schools and literacy in response to colonialism. Removal, however, raised new questions about the future of Creeks in Indian Territory and their relationship with the United States. Creeks began to follow the example of the Cherokees and Choctaws and gradually saw the potential that schools held for building a prosperous, sovereign nation on equal terms with the United States. As Creeks reconsidered the potential for schools under their control, the 1840s ushered in a new era of educational experimentation in their nation.

[85] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 120.

CHAPTER TWO:

EXPERIMENTAL EDUCATION IN THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD

A surprising education advocate addressed the need for schools in the Creek Nation in the 1840s. Notoriously opposed to Christian influence and white encroachment, Opothle Yahola had served as a prominent Upper Creek leader since before removal to Indian Territory. He declared in an eloquent statement before the Creek Council, "I have always been opposed to the white man's religion, but I am not opposed to education. We must educate our children and instill in them a love of their race so that they may stand between us and trouble." Opothle Yahola's message struck a chord among leaders who actively wanted to expand educational opportunities and those more culturally conservative members who increasingly recognized the potential benefits of English literacy.[1] His address exemplified an emerging effort to expand schooling in the Creek Nation.

Rather than a means of assimilating into Euro-American society, Opothle Yahola conceived education as a tool to bind his people together and help them protect their nation. Although labeled a cultural conservative who could not read or write, he recognized the benefits of an English education. He even sent his son to the Choctaw Academy in Kentucky to master these skills. Like common school reformers in the United States, Opothle Yahola encouraged education in response to the economic, social, and political shifts in his own nation. Foremost among these changes was the

[1] Opothleyohola from W.B. Morrison's "Father Murrow" in *My Oklahoma*, file 1, box 1, Opothleyohola Collection, Native American Manuscripts, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma (hereafter cited as WHC).. The typescript is undated but Murrow attended Creek Councils in the late 1840s when Opothleyohola began publicly advocating education after the resettlement in Indian Territory. Also see Mary Jane Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991), 41.

Creeks' forced relocation to Indian Territory in the 1830s. This devastating event sparked a revitalized desire for educated, bilingual leaders who could negotiate with Euro-Americans on equal footing. While rebuilding in Indian Territory, Opothle Yahola noted the need for schools more than ever as a defense mechanism.[2] He also recognized the success of public school systems already established by the Cherokee and Choctaw Nations.[3]

This chapter argues that during the 1840s and 1850s, Creek leaders, citizens, and white missionaries both debated which forms of education would prove the most advantageous to the nation and experimented with different models. In this period of trial and error, the Creek government and citizens worked to mold schools to fit their own local and national needs, worldviews, and everyday practices. Diverse individuals articulated educational visions for their nation in conversation with fellow citizens and officials and educators from the U.S. Rather than forfeiting indigenous culture and sovereignty to assimilate into the American republic, Creeks turned to education as a strategy to shape their society and reinforce their identity in the post-removal era. Schools increasingly became a central component of Creek society during the 1850s. By the end of the decade, the council had established an official system of education

[2] Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation*, 41.

[3] For more on antebellum schooling in the Cherokee Nation see Devon Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909* (Champagne-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997) and *James Parins, Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation, 1820–1906* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013). For more on Choctaw schools see Jeff Fortney, "Robert M. Jones and the Choctaw Nation: Indigenous Nationalism in the American South" (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2014), 68-113.

that reflected deeper social and political transformations. Through this process, Creeks transformed schools from colonial tools into indigenous institutions.[4]

Although Creeks, as well as Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws developed public school systems in Indian Territory during the antebellum period, education historians have overlooked these institutions. They have elaborated on Horace Mann's common school movement, its impact on white U.S. citizens, and the exclusion of African Americans and Native Americans from this system.[5] Nevertheless, the common schools established by sovereign indigenous nations during the same period complicate the larger narrative of education for these racial groups. Studies of antebellum education also often offer regional comparisons between the North and South but the Five Tribes' relocation to Indian Territory provides an opportunity to shift the geographic framework westward.[6] For instance, in his seminal work on common school education in America, historian Carl Kaestle asserts that at the beginning of the antebellum period, "America had schools, but except in large cities, America did not have school systems." In both the North and the South at this time, schools in rural

[4] Anthropologist Linda K. Neuman has described this process as a transformation of "schools for Indians" into "Indian schools." See Linda K. Neuman, *Indian Play: Indigenous Identities at Bacone* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 1-28. In this study, Neuman traces this transformation at Bacone University in Muskogee, Oklahoma, and argues, "Students used Bacone as a space for the exploration of their own and others' Indian identities, as they learned from one another." Tash Smith makes a similar argument concerning Methodist churches among the "Five Civilized Tribes." He asserts "Indians … infused churches with elements from their own culture, which differentiated them from the mainstream. These congregations tapped into resources of white dominated organizations through the threads of Christianity and missionary outreach, but Native ministers and members established churches that were distinctly 'Indian' in appearance." Tash Smith, *Capture These Indians for the Lord: Indians, Methodists, and Oklahomans, 1844-1939* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 6.

[5] For more on the early common school movement see Carl Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) and William J. Reese, *America's Public Schools: From the Common School to "No Child Left Behind"* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2011). See Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) for a discussion of race and the common school movement.

areas remained locally controlled for the most part, often with little or no financial support from state governments or regulation by state legislatures.[7] More systematic state funding and support for rural schools developed in the North from the 1830s through the 1850s. Native governments also began to finance, legislate for, and administer schools on a centralized basis west of the Mississippi in the early 1840s. Thus, the Creek Nation offers a rich starting point for reconsidering the variety of schools in antebellum North America and the ways in which diverse groups shaped and utilized education.

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The 1840s proved a tumultuous period for the Creeks as they struggled to rebuild. Prior to removal, the majority of Creeks resisted missionary influence but now a growing number desired to make western-style schools and English literacy a central component of Creek nationhood in the west. Several factors influenced this shift. Leaders, including conservatives like Opothle Yahola, recognized the continued need for English literate leaders who could negotiate with U.S. officials to prevent another removal crisis. Creek leaders, including Chief Roley McIntosh, also became more accepting toward Christianity, lifted the previous ban, and cooperated with missionaries who would work under their terms. Finally, the successes of the Cherokee and Choctaw education experiments demonstrated to Creeks that under the right circumstances, schools could benefit rather than harm their society.

The Cherokee and Choctaw Nations operated several boarding schools co-sponsored by their governments and missionary societies and dozens of day schools

[7] Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 62.

during the 1840s. In 1841, the Cherokee Council passed the Public Education Act and within five years, twenty-one free public schools were operating in various communities. James Parins explains that as the Cherokee Nation "grew in wealth and stature, its educational system expanded from a few missionary schools to a public school network that introduced the schoolhouse into every Cherokee community of any size in the new country in Indian Territory."[8] During the same period, the Choctaw Council built three large male academies, five female academies, and some smaller schools. They "set the example of voluntary contribution by devoting to that object $18,000 of the annuities paid them distributively." The Chickasaws followed suit by allocating annuity payments towards national schools, and Creek leaders took considerable notice. As William Armstrong reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, "The idea of creating schools themselves, in their own country, under their own control and supervision, has had great effect upon the adjoining tribes, inducing some to take steps of like nature."[9]

Like Cherokees and Choctaws, Creeks began to recognize the potential benefits of having a new, educated generation as a defense against further colonization. Creek children could receive the same opportunities, not only as those in other prosperous indigenous nations, but also as their white peers in the United States. Leaders also recognized that some former mission school and Choctaw Academy pupils ascended to leading roles in local communities, diplomatic negotiations, and trade relations. Consequently, the Creek Council began to follow the tactics of the Cherokees and Choctaws to make education a central feature of their own society.

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[8] Parins, *Literacy and Intellectual Life*, 68, 77-78.

[9] William Armstrong to William Medill, *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs*, (hereafter cited as *ARCIA*), 1846, 340-341.

As one strategy to shift schools from external American-control to internal indigenous control, leaders of the Native nations began to remove students from Choctaw Academy. Choctaws started to refuse to send their children to Kentucky during removal. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, former supporters now believed the academy was too far to send their children away from their families. Second, as Jeff Fortney explains, "Many former students had become fervent nationalists and believed that an academy bearing their name and educating their children should be within the geographic limits of their nation." In collaboration with the ABCFM, the Choctaw General Council built Spencer Academy as a replacement and then proceeded to build other national academies.[10]

By this time, Creeks also began to bar children from attending Choctaw Academy. They displayed "much opposition" and asserted, "their young men, who have been educated there, invariably make drunkards, idlers, and otherwise bad members of Society."[11] While some former students returned to become leading members of society, others found themselves disconnected from their families, customs, and responsibilities. One reportedly became so disillusioned when he returned that he died in "a drunken frolic."[12] For over a decade, Choctaws had attempted to wrestle control from federal officials in light of the accusations of corruption and mistreatment that plagued Choctaw Academy. Creeks also blamed the academy's administrators and the federal government for the difficulties experienced by returning students.

In June of 1845, James Logan, the Creek agent, lost favor with council members when he openly defied their wishes by sending a group of students to the academy. He

[10] Fortney, "Robert M. Jones and the Choctaw Nation," 87.
[11] "Report of Creek Agent, 1845," box 38, vol. 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.
[12] "Report of Creek Agent, 1845," box 38, vol 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

took seven young boys from their families. Logan claimed that they were "obtained from their parents and sent on their way with full approbation."[13] Chief Roley McIntosh, however, believed Logan had usurped his own authority and accused him of kidnapping the children. He conveyed this to the Secretary of Indian Affairs and demanded they be returned to the Creek Nation.[14] In an attempt to defend his actions, Logan asked one of the parents, Phillip Grayson, to sign "a paper denying of his stealing the boys." Grayson, who was not literate in English, put his mark on the paper but later recanted and accused Logan of misleading him. In a statement addressed to William Armstrong and witnessed by McIntosh and a group of other leading men, Grayson explained that it was his "particular desire for them to be immediately brought back."[15] "I am always disposed to act in accordance with the will & wish of my countrymen," he wrote to Armstrong.[16] Grayson might have wanted his child to attend school, but his desire to adhere to the leaders' authority was stronger.

As an alternative to Choctaw Academy, Creek leaders made the establishment of manual labor schools within their own territory—similar to the Choctaws' Spencer Academy—their focus. An 1845 treaty between the Creeks, the U.S., and the Seminoles allocated funding towards two manual labor institutions within the bounds of the Creek Nation.[17] In 1847, the council negotiated contracts for these schools with Christian benevolent societies in the U.S. Leaders agreed to apportion educational annuity funds to pay for the general expenses of the schools if the missionary boards

[13] "Report of Creek Agent, 1845," box 38, vol 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

[14]Creek Chiefs to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy, M234, School files, roll 778, slides 925-926, 1060-1061.

[15] "Phillip Grayson to William Armstrong concerning Creek boys taken to Choctaw Academy, 1845," box 38, vol 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

[16] "Phillip Grayson to William Armstrong concerning Creek boys taken to Choctaw Academy, 1845," box 38, vol 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

[17] William Armstrong to William Medill, *ARCIA*, 1846, 342.

provided trained teachers. The Creek Council entered into an agreement with the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions to open a large, manual labor school named Tullahassee in the northeastern portion of the nation, near the plantations of several affluent families. Likewise, the council formed a similar agreement with the Methodists to open the Asbury manual labor school at North Fork town, a growing trade center in the southern portion of the nation located between the Canadian River and its north fork.[18]

The ample funding from this annuity allowed for the construction of state-of-the-art facilities. Asbury was a large three-story stone building with twenty-one rooms located on a tract of over twenty acres. It was also outfitted with livestock and farm supplies.[19] Construction commenced on the second school, Tullahassee, in 1848. A visitor described it as "a substantial brick building of three stories high with a modest cupola, in which is a small bell." The school grounds included an "orchard, workshop, tool-room, and stables," as well as the farm acreage, chapel, and cemetery.[20] The new schools each accommodated forty male and forty female students, varying in age from six to eighteen. Two previously constructed schools also continued to operate with the blessing of the Creek Council. These included Coweta, the Presbyterian mission that expanded to house up to fifty students, and a new Baptist mission school that boarded

[18] Robert M. Loughridge, "History of Mission Work Among the Creek Indians from 1832 to 1888 Under the Direction of the Board of Foreign Missions Presbyterian Church in the U.S.," typescript manuscript, folder 1, Robert M. Loughridge Collection, OHS; Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 120-121; Virginia E. Lauerdale, "Tullahassee Mission," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 26 (Fall 1948): 285-300.

[19] Thos. B. Ruble to Co. Raiford, Oct. 8, 1849, ARCIA, 1849, 1124.

[20] A.W. Loomis, *Scenes in the Indian Country* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1859), 39-40.

approximately thirty students.[21] More Creek children than ever before, both male and female, now had access to formal schools.

Though it is tempting to liken these manual labor schools to the federal boarding schools of the late nineteenth century, they differed profoundly in their objectives and administration.[22] Their position in Creek territory, rather than off-reservation, forced white missionaries to forge political and social connections in communities to create change from within society. The proximity to their homes also assisted students in maintaining ties with their language, kin, and cultural practices. While teachers and superintendents at both sorts of schools had similar clear-cut goals of "civilizing" their students, the staff at the Creek schools did not typically employ the harsh approach later adopted in federal boarding schools. Reverend Hamilton Balentine, who served as superintendent at the Coweta school, explained: "In the teaching of these children we have constantly had in view a threefold object, viz: first, the development of their moral and religious powers; secondly, the expansion and cultivation of their intellectual capacities; and, thirdly, the application of their physical powers to purposes of utility."[23]

Even though missionaries intended each of these three objectives to "civilize" their students, the Creek Council supported the curriculum. The government provided consent and financial support for children to receive an English education that would afford them intellectual, social, and economic advantages necessary to compete with

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[21] Debo, *Road to Disappearance,* 120-121.

[22] Several scholars have chronicled assimilation policies in federal boarding schools and students' experiences in these schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Adams, *Education for Extinction* provides the most extensive synthesis on the topic. Adams places assimilation policy within a framework of colonialism, arguing that agents of assimilation believed "last great Indian war should be waged against the children." Adams explains that assimilationists sought "the eradication of all traces of tribal identity and culture" to replace them with the "values of white civilization" through boarding school education. See pages 335-336.

[23] A. Balentine, Supt. Of Kowetah School to Col. Raiford, Oct. 3, 1849, *ARCIA*, 1849, 1126.

Euro-Americans. Yet, the schools themselves were enmeshed in divisive debates in Creek society concerning the degree to which the post-removal nation should embrace "civilization" and its many corollaries. Thus, the students' experiences at the schools reflect broader changes in post-removal Creek society, including an emphasis on shifting gender roles, increasing Christian conversion, and literacy.[24]

Daily routines at the schools reflected these changes. At dawn, the mission bell rang and the pupils would rise and tidy their rooms. Male students tended to the outdoor morning chores, including feeding the livestock, chopping firewood, and drawing water from the well. Meanwhile, female students prepared breakfast, milked the cows, and then spent any spare time sewing and knitting. The children usually gathered to eat breakfast at seven o'clock. Each day, the mission family and students then spent time in "family worship, consisting of reading the scriptures, singing, and prayer." Beginning at nine o'clock students attended class for three hours. They gathered for their mid-day meal at noon and then had a period of recreation. Classes commenced from one to four o'clock, during which the children studied their texts and performed recitations. While they studied, slaves hired or rented by the missionaries would continue laboring on farm and domestic tasks. In the evening, students completed more chores necessary for the upkeep of the mission and then ate supper.

[24] See Claudio Saunt, "Telling Stories: The Political Uses of Myth and History in the Cherokee and Creek Nations." *The Journal of American History* 93:3 (December, 2006) for a discussion of how literate Creeks adapted Euro-American conceptions of Christianity and history to their advantage in relations with Euro-Americans. Also see Mary Jane Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1991) for a treatment of these issues in the post-removal Creek Nation through the experiences of George Washington Grayson.

Children and teachers then recited scripture verses together until around eight o'clock when everyone retired to bed.[25]

This daily routine at the schools reinforced Euro-American gender roles and the increasing acceptance of them among some sectors of Creek society. In her study of the Cherokee Female Seminary, historian Devon Mihesuah argues that in attempts to mold Cherokee society along the lines of white society, Cherokee leaders desired that "Educated females would become pious homemakers and companions to their prominent husbands, whose self-esteem was undoubtedly elevated by placing women in a position that seemed exalted yet subservient." By this time, Creeks, like the Cherokees increasingly adopted a patriarchal system that "recognized males as the leaders of the social order."[26] Although they did not yet have the resources to establish separate male and female academies like the Cherokee Nation, education within the new manual-labor schools was shaped by Creek adaptations of Euro-American gender ideology, as well as by the attitudes of the white missionaries who led the schools. Even patterns of attendance reflect the degree to which gender roles had transitioned by the mid-nineteenth century. Male students regularly attended during the fall and winter "but when spring set in many of the boys were called off to aid their parents for a season about their farms and cattle." Now, "the girls' department remained full" as young Creek males rather than females lent their labor to families' agricultural production.[27] This marked a shift from more traditional Creek gender roles in which

[25] R.M. Loughridge to Col. Philip Raiford, Agent of the Creeks, August 28, 1851, Presbyterian Historical Society (hereafter cited as PHS), roll 16, no. 75; Also see the" Order of Examination Subjects, 1853," series 1, box 8, folder 9 Alice Mary Robertson Collection, Special Collections, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa (hereafter cited as AMRC).

[26] Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 21.

[27] R.M. Loughridge to W.H. Garret, September 13, 1859, *ARCIA*, 1859, 548.

women performed agricultural labor. Thus, boys were trained to become industrious citizens and economically independent members of society, while girls were trained to become nurturing wives and mothers to the men of the Creek Nation.

In many ways, female education in the manual-labor schools mirrored the experiences of young women in academies throughout the South. They received the same academic training as their male counterparts, but their teachers were "intent on creating pious Christian women noted for their benevolent activities within the domestic sphere."[28] Of course, both male and female Creek students faced challenges that white students in the South did not, including language barriers, racialized expectations of academic performance, and the structuring colonial policies of the federal government. Female Creek students also faced an additional obstacle. Women's education in the antebellum South and the North allowed women increasingly to create a wedge in society and enter the public sphere as teachers, writers, and reformers. Creek female education, though similar, marked an alternative trend in their society: the diminishing political and economic power of woman. Although Creek women could benefit from education in many of the same ways that Euro-American women could, the social impact of was different because of the different trajectories of women's roles in the two societies. Historians have largely excluded indigenous and African American women from interpretations of female schooling in antebellum America. Nevertheless, their experiences offer useful insights into how ideologies of race and gender shaped the educational experiences and the broader social relations in indigenous nations and the American republic at the time.

[28] Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South*, (New York City: New York University Press, 1995), 4.

The manual labor curriculum at the mission schools served as the primary means for reinforcing these shifting gender roles. Teachers emphasized work as a contribution to the mission family, underscoring that domestic tasks and agricultural production were important to well-functioning households. As historian Rebecca McNulty-Schreiber argues, missionaries in the Creek Nation introduced a strong focus on the Christian family and domesticity as part of the structure of the manual model.[29] These schools differed from later forms of exploitative labor designed to train Native peoples as a marginalized work force. The emphasis on gentle, Christian learning and the mission family played a strong role in mitigating such coercive labor requirements.

Euro-American gender ideology also shaped the construction of the mission family. Christian beliefs in family hierarchy placed males as the head of household. The early nineteenth century ideology of "Republican Motherhood," in which "righteous mothers were asked to raise virtuous male citizens on whom the health of the Republic depended," also influenced gender roles at the missions.[30] The emergence of this ideology coincided with education reform efforts and female teachers served as a natural outgrowth of this role. At the missions, female teachers were expected to function as nurturing mother-figures for their students. For instance, William Robertson at Tullahassee wrote that female teachers "should feel and show an interest in their comfort and happiness out of school by mingling with & watching over them in their leisure hours—should be at once teacher friend sister mother."[31] Likewise, male

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[29] Rebecca McNulty Schreiber, "Education for Empire: Manual Labor, Civilization, and the Family in Nineteenth-Century American Missionary Education," (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 2002), 112.

[30] Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 10.

[31] William Schenk Robertson to Walter Lowrie, November 12, 1851, quoted in Schreiber, "Education for Empire," 112.

missionaries served the role of the Christian patriarch. One visitor to the Coweta school observed that the teacher "will be remembered by these boys as long as they live; by many he will be loved, something, perhaps, as you remember a parent."[32] Missionary societies preferred married couples to head the schools or encouraged single missionaries to find a spouse upon their arrival. For instance, soon after William Robertson arrived to teach at Tullahassee, he married Eliza Ann Worcester, the daughter of long-time Cherokee missionary Samuel Worcester. Their marriage reinforced the mission family as the model for teaching Euro-American gender norms and family structure based on patriarchy.[33]

As part of gendered expectations, teachers reinforced Christian values of purity and chastity and discouraged sexual behavior. Not only did they assign male and female students separate sleeping quarters, they also segregated all of the communal spaces, including the dining hall and schoolyard.[34] Missionaries especially feared sexual liaisons between students. Many Creeks had adopted Euro-American and Christian marital practices by the 1850s, but teachers still feared premarital and extramarital relations and deemed them sinful. As such, they encouraged students to adopt white, Protestant, sexual mores.[35]

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[32] Loomis, *Scenes of Indian Country*, 69.

[33] Althea Bass, *The Story of Tullahassee* (Oklahoma City: Semco Color Press, 1960), 35-49. In *Federal Fathers and Mothers*, Cathleen Cahill details how the late nineteenth and twentieth century schools under the direction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs replicated the emphasis on married couples. Instead of simply modeling the Christian family, however, she argues these couples represent the larger project of "intimate colonialism" because they served "symbolically as federal fathers and mothers to their wards." See Cathleen Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 83.

[34] Thomas B. Ruble, Report on the Asbury Manual Labor School, August 15, 1853, ARCIA, 1853, 392.

[35] For a discussion of traditional Creek social practices see Benjamin Hawkins, *The Collected Works of Benjamin Hawkins*, edited by Thomas Foster (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 73s.

Of course, the missionaries did not always practice what they preached, and Creek leaders showed no tolerance for their indiscretions. A particularly scandalous situation emerged in 1853 at the Coweta School, when one of the teachers, Mr. Byers, allegedly committed several improper acts. A witness accused Byers of bestiality with his horse. While he denied actually having intercourse with the animal, he confessed to simulating sexual acts with it. Matters became worse when his sister-in-law alleged that he had fathered her child. The other Presbyterian missionaries agreed that he should leave the Creek Nation immediately. The superintendent at Coweta, H. Templeton, especially feared Byers might prey on the older girls at the school if he remained. He was particularly concerned about a few "large girls in school who had been out of school for a year, & in this adulterous nation may have been exposed to temptation during their absence." Fearing a repeat of the Creek Council's 1836 missionary expulsion, the ministers took immediate action against Byers. They understood that the Creek Council would not accept any wrongdoing by those charged with teaching their children.[36]

Students' own understandings of gendered behavior also shaped their interactions with others at the schools. For instance, as a teenager George Washington (Wash) Grayson found that although he was "not allowed to meet and talk with the girls of the school," he suspected that one of the white teacher's daughters, Miss Eva Munson, had developed a crush on him. She confirmed his suspicions when Wash and his younger brother Sam prepared to depart for school break. Fearing she would never see him again, the girl "broke down and cried, causing something of a scene among the school girls" to the young man's "infinite embarrassment and confusion." Wash wrote,

[36] H. Templeton to Walter C. Lowrie, Dec. 10, 1853, PHS, roll 16, no. 287.

"This seemed remarkably strange in a young girl to me as to the other pupils of the school, as we knew that an Indian maiden would calmly bear to have an arm cut off rather than betray such emotions in public because of her attachment to a person of the opposite sex." Bewildered, he remarked, "This showing in this girl was a kind of weakness altogether remarkable and unexpected to our simple natures."[37] As this scene illustrates, students did not easily relinquish their own ideas about appropriate gendered behavior.

In addition to a focus on the Christian family and female virtue, the moral education of Creek children at the missions included worship. Family influence and peers at school often influenced students' reactions to their Christian instruction. For instance, their teacher described two eleven-year-old cousins enrolled in Coweta, as "well behaved" with good disposition. Yet, they showed little interest in converting, a factor which their instructor attributed to the fact that their "friends were opposed to Christianity."[38] Students decided for themselves whether to embrace religion as modeled by their teachers or to reject it.

For those who did convert at the schools, they negotiated their own understanding of Christianity and Creek spiritual beliefs. This was the case with Charles Barnett. In 1850, Barnett was Coweta's "most advanced student." His teacher, James Ross Ramsey, a Princeton educated missionary, regarded the boy highly. He found him to be "very moral in his character," despite the fact that he had not converted.

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[37] George W. Grayson, *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy: The Autobiography of Chief G.W. Grayson*, edited by W. David Baird (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1988), 43. Mary Jane Warde provides an extensive biography of Grayson in *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation*. In *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Claudio Saunt details the history of the Grayson family.

[38] List of Kowetah Students, PHS, roll 16, no. 150.

Barnett quickly mastered reading and writing in English and served as the interpreter at the school and at church services.[39] Barnett's intellectual abilities, rather than coercion on the part of the missionaries, eventually led him to adopt Christianity. After reading the widely influential Christian tract *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* by Philip Doddridge, an eighteenth-century British reformer, he embraced the Presbyterian teachings at the school. This remarkable scholar's life came to an early close, however, when he fell ill with "pulmonary affection." On his deathbed, he asked his fellow students to join him and told them that they "should love Jesus Christ and prepare to meet him in Heaven."[40]

Since Barnett's fellow pupils admired and respected him, his deathbed plea sparked "a revival of religion." Prior to this, some of the students had run away and like Barnett had shown a reluctance to embrace Christianity. Encouraged, James Ross Ramsay found many of his students more dedicated to moral and scholastic improvement after the incident. One of the girls, Kisia Anderson, had been so "extremely dull in study" that the teachers "thought of advising her father to take her out of the school." During the revival, however, as one of the "subjects of grace" Anderson "became one of the brightest" pupils.[41] Charles Barnett forged his own path to Christian conversion and encouraged his peers to succeed at the school following his death. His experience demonstrates that students negotiated their own learning experiences.

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[39] James Ross Ramsay Autobiography, box 1, folder 1, James Ross Ramsay Collection, Seminole Nation Papers, Native American Manuscripts, WHC, 23-24.

[40]James Ross Ramsay Autobiography, box 1, folder 1, James Ross Ramsay Collection, Seminole Nation Papers, Native American Manuscripts, WHC, 24.

[41] James Ross Ramsay Autobiography, box 1, folder 1, James Ross Ramsay Collection, Seminole Nation Papers, Native American Manuscripts, WHC, 24.

In addition to Christian instruction, the curriculum also reflected the growing desire for literacy among Creek leaders and parents. In fact, once students learned English, they spent the majority of their time in rigorous academic study. At Tullahassee students studied "spelling, reading, writing, mental and practical arithmetic" using standard American textbooks, including McGuffey's Reader. The more advanced students studied "algebra, geometry, English grammar, natural philosophy, composition, and declamation," as well as history, music, geography, Latin, and Greek.[42] Coweta and Asbury used similar curriculum materials. These advanced studies mirrored those of students in academies and secondary schools in the United States, as well as the newly established Cherokee Male and Female seminaries.[43]

Student responses to their academic studies at the mission schools varied considerably. Many pupils, including those fluent in English, often found the workload and expectations of their teachers to be demanding. Nevertheless, many excelled. For instance, while learning "Geography & the Third reader & Arithmetic 2nd part - penmanship and compositions," Creek youth William McIntosh informed his kin "I am very glad to say that we will have Vacation in about two weeks from this time…Rev W Balentine is teaching this term he make us Study pretty hard I can tell you he does."[44] Similarly, Wash Grayson recalled as he "struggled through long division to the unraveling of the mysteries of binomial theorem, the digging out of Latin roots and kindred work." He described himself as a "slow plodding learner at best" who kept up with his classes only by "close and unremitting work."[45] Because of his diligence,

[42] Quoted in Bass, *The Story of Tullahassee*, 53.
[43] Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds,* 34-35.
[44] McIntosh, William (cousin) to Henry Shaw, 1850, series 2, box 5, folder 10, AMRC.
[45] Grayson, *Creek Warrior for the Confederacy*, 43-44.

Wash along with his brother Sam became among the most advanced students at Asbury. The intellectual capacity of the scholars often surprised their Euro-American teachers, who commonly associated "Indianness" with ignorance and savagery. In one case, the Coweta superintendent reported to the Creek agent that his students' academic progress was "bordering on the extraordinary." In fact, he found them to have a high aptitude for learning and noted their progress to be "fully equal to that of any school with which I have been acquainted in the States." [46]

The heavy focus on English literacy did not inhibit the use of the Muskogee language. Teachers found that many of the students refused to give up their native tongue. As Superintendent Robert Loughridge observed, "Those who did not understand the English language, and would not try to learn it made but little progress."[47] Even those who did master English continued to speak their native language at school and at home, guaranteeing that English literacy would not eradicate Muskogee. Presbyterian missionary David Eakins, a vocal critic of the manual labor schools, noted "we have known of cases in which the children of half-breeds, who were unacquainted with the Indian language, acquiring a respectable knowledge of it by being thrown in these large places where it was in constant use."[48] For him, this trend represented a failure in "civilization" policy. What Eakins observed, however, was an adaptation of schools as spaces where students incorporated western knowledge systems into their existing worldviews and practices.

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[46] A. Balentine, Supt. of Kowetah School to Col. Raiford, Oct. 3, 1849, *ARCIA*, 1849, 1126.

[47] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work Among the Creek," folder 1, Robert M. Loughridge Collection, OHS, 30.

[48] David W. Eakins to Col. P.H. Raiford, Oct. 25, 1849, *ARCIA*, 1849, 1120.

Mission school pupils soon assisted in shaping new forms of literacy beyond English. In her study Hilary E. Wyss argues, "Examining Native texts in all their variety recovers a myriad of overlapping needs and desires shaping Indian education."[49] Although missionaries hoped to use literacy to convert their students, Creeks had their own desires and actively worked to spread both English and Muskogee literacy. Interpreters at Tullahassee collaborated with William Robertson and his wife Ann Eliza to transcribe Muskogee and produce pedagogical materials. The Robertsons were skilled linguists who quickly learned the language and went to work translating a number of texts into Muskogee, including scripture, hymns, and a number of classic Greek and Latin tracts. Ann Eliza grew up speaking Cherokee and English fluently and trained in Greek and Latin at St. Johnsbury Academy in Vermont. Only with the assistance of advanced students and interpreters, however, did she succeed in her work.[50] As a result, the experiments with these early mission schools coincided with the transition of Muskogee from an oral to written language.

A Creek preacher and scholar named David Winslett proved instrumental to this process. In 1845, Robert Loughridge hired Winslett as a laborer at the Coweta School at the age of sixteen. The superintendent taught him to read and allowed him to work by day and study at night. Winslett learned English so rapidly that Loughridge invited him to enroll as a student at Coweta and then he transferred to Tullahassee once it opened. Once there, he devoted his time to "the education and Christianization of his people," serving as an interpreter and then studying the ministry under the direction of

[49] Hilary E. Wyss, *English Letters and Indian Literacies: Reading, Writing, and New England Missionary Schools, 1750-1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 5-6.

[50] Hope Holway, "Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson as a Linguist." Chronicles of Oklahoma 37 (Spring 1959): 35-44.

the Creek Presbytery. During the 1850s, he assisted Loughridge and the Robertsons in their language studies and collaborated with them to translate a number of texts. Together, he and William Robertson translated McGuffey's 1st Reader into Muskogee. They published the volume as *Nakcokv es Keretv Enhvtecesk* (Creek First Reader) in 1856. Missionaries and fellow Creeks lauded Winslett for his "noble Christian character," preaching, and intellectual prowess. As his former teacher explained, "His services in the translation of the Scriptures and in aiding and preparing hymns and other books in the Creek language was of immense value to the cause of Christ in the nation."[51] Winslett's life came to a tragic and early end in 1861 but during his lifetime, he played an instrumental role in spreading Muskogee literacy.

Altogether, students and their families reacted to the curriculum on gender ideology, Christianity, and literacy in diverse ways. In turn, they made their own contributions to the experiments with mission schools led by white teachers. As designed by the members of the Creek Council, locating the schools within the bounds of their nation prevented student from becoming estranged from their society. Some found an easy balance and simply fit school time within the broader rhythms of life in Creek country. In the summer months, families produced corn, potatoes, and other crops, held ceremonies, and carried out ball plays. Students would travel home to rejoin their towns and lend their labor to their families' production during this time. They would also attended ceremonies where elders recounted oral traditions and instructed youths in their familial and social obligations.[52] Thus, many of the mission school

[51] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work Among the Creek," folder 1, Robert M. Loughridge Collection, OHS, 19-20.

[52] The busk, also known as the Green Corn Ceremony, was the most important ceremony in Creek life. It was a thanksgiving celebration that coincided with the arrival of the annual corn crop. At

students experienced a blend of formal schooling and more traditional forms of Creek education.[53]

For some, however, the longstanding forms of Creek education – laboring with families, instruction from clan elders, and ceremonial life – ill prepared them for the rigidity of the mission schools. As one contemporary observer noted, "Untutored Indian students are not to be reconciled at once to the dull routine of the school, and the stately uniformity of a well ordered household: it is a great change from the free and indolent life to which they had been accustomed."[54] Others found their teachers' expectations of Euro-American behavior too restricting and their studies too demanding. Some ran away and gained temporary reprieve, but their parents sent them back to school the following term. Still, others changed their minds on their own and returned to school for a second chance. For instance, a handful of students ran away from Tullahassee during its first term. The following year, several of the "runaways desirous of getting back again," gathered at the school in hopes of reclaiming their spots.[55]

Illness posed another serious challenge for the manual labor schools and raised parents' concerns. Teachers and students alike fell victim to waves of seasonal illness and widespread outbreaks of measles, dysentery, whooping cough and other infectious diseases. Close quarters, the distance to doctors, and a lack of medical supplies and

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this event, community members experienced spiritual renewal, forgave crimes, and reinforced social responsibilities. Adults gathered children together and taught them ceremonial customs and beliefs while reinforcing social roles and duties to their families and towns. Benjamin W. Griffith, Jr. *McIntosh and Weatherford, Creek Indian Leaders* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 19-20, and William Bartram, *William Bartram on the Southeastern Indians,* eds. Gregory A. Waselkov and Kathryn E. Holland Braund (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 149-150.

[53] For example, see Charles Barnett, Autobiography of a Creek Student, series 2, box 1, folder 6, AMRC.

[54] Loomis, *Scenes of Indian Country*, 70.

[55] W.S. Robertson to Walter Lowrie, October 3, 1851, PHS, roll 16, no. 85.

effective treatments allowed diseases to spread rapidly. When word of sickness at the schools reached neighborhoods, parents would come and "insist upon taking them home to be doctored" with Creek healing practices. When fourteen-year-old Simon Kully caught pneumonia at Tullahassee during the winter of 1850, his father came to fetch him. The superintendent pled with the man to leave Simon but despite all his "entreaties and advice he persisted in taking him away homewards, ten miles on horseback." The boy died on the journey. Loughridge attributed the father's actions to the "evil of this superstitious dependence on the arts of conjurors." He found that many of the students' parents had such confidence in their healers "that they are not satisfied with any other treatments."[56] Of course, Simon Kully's father and other parents likely recognized that the missionaries' treatments did not always prevent the deaths of students either. In this case, the missionaries' efforts to heal the boy left him ill enough that he died on the way. Concern for the health and safety of their children proved a powerful motivation for parents to remove them from schools.

Like Simon Kully's father, Creek parents carefully exercised authority over their children's presence at the schools, dictating if and when they would be in attendance. Students whose parents did not wish them to enroll in the schools did not, and neither teachers nor federal officials had the authority to force them to attend. Some parents made the decision to remove their children when they complained about food, studying, or other conditions. Still other parents saw to it that their children remained in school despite youthful complaints. At Asbury, Wash Grayson and his brother, Sam watched as some of their peers "prevailed upon them [their parents] to take them away from school." They understood, however, that their "parents would refuse to permit any such

[56] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work," 27.

representations or acts to influence them to interfere with the continuity our attendance at school."[57] To the frustration of the missionary teachers, some parents who desired education still refused to comply with the set schedule. During certain seasons, families relied on their children's labor for subsistence and production of cash crops and livestock. Thus, children would leave for long periods and then rejoin their classmates once they had fulfilled their familial obligations. This pattern illustrates ways in which Creek citizens molded western-style education and the experimental manual labor schools to fit their own lifestyles.[58]

The English education, Christianity, and Euro-American gender norms students learned at the schools in the 1850s provided them with a decidedly different childhood experience than that of contemporary Creek children who did not attend mission schools. Mission school students continued to identify as Creeks but their experiences added layers of complexity and exacerbated tensions in Creek social relations.[59] Some students blended various forms of education, which subsequently shaped their worldviews and early life experiences. Students in the schools also forged new connections with one another. Cherokee literary scholar Joshua Nelson poses the question, "If the Cherokee seminaries, for instance, didn't teach Cherokee history or language in their official curricula, did that prevent students from learning these from each other and forging strong Cherokee communities there?" The answer for both Cherokee students and Creek students is no. As Nelson argues, "tribal traditions can

[57] Grayson, *Warrior for the Confederacy*, 42.
[58] R.M Loughridge to W.H. Garret, September 13, 1859, *ARCIA*, 1859, 548.
[59] As Devon Mihesuah suggests mission schooling at times served to "widen the gulf" between different sectors of Cherokee society. Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 8.

adapt and change without losing their character."[60] During the 1850s, Creek education adapted to include formal schooling.

The experiments with these early Creek institutions, however, revealed one clear flaw: they only served a small number of children. The schools opened at a time when lines of race and socio-economic status became pronounced throughout the Creek Nation, and they soon gained a reputation as elitist and exclusive, prompting broader discussion over who should or should not have access to education. Kinship relations, cultural orientation, class, and race, in particular, increasingly limited the opportunities for many youths to attend the mission schools.

Elite Creeks and missionaries contributed to the exclusivity of the institutions. The agreements between the Creek Council and the benevolent societies dictated a board of trustees would select the scholar to attend Tullahassee and Asbury each term. Families from near and far brought potential students to the schools to fill vacancies in the slots for forty male and forty female students.[61] The trustees, often missionaries and Creek men of influence, fell under great pressure to select members of affluent and politically powerful families. Walter Lowrie, Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, lamented the situation. He explained, "It is a difficult matter for the trustees to make these selections without giving offence to the Indian families. It is fair to presume that they could only make a satisfactory selection gradually," but instead "scholars were admitted as soon as they were presented."[62] The missionaries also worked to restrict access to the schools. After years of struggling with non-English

[60] Joshua B. Nelson, *Progressive Traditions: Identity in Cherokee Literature and Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), xi-xii.

[61] W.S. Robertson to Walter Lowrie, October 3, 1851, PHS, roll 16, no. 85.

[62] Walter Lowrie to Luke Lea, Esq., September 30, 1850, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy, M234, School files, roll 785, slide 339.

speaking students who had trouble adjusting to the unfamiliar environment, the educators enacted a rule "requiring the children, as far as possible, to speak the English language upon entry."[63] This requirement empowered the schools to favor the progeny of the most politically powerful, affluent, and Euro-American oriented families.

Although historian Angie Debo asserts, "In general…it was only the mixed bloods that attended the school," this type of generalization is misleading.[64] In her study of Cherokee kinship practices, Rose Stremlau suggests, "when used without explanation, the terms 'mixed-blood' and full-blood' are racist distractions," a binary imposed on the Five Tribes from the "colonizers' perspective." Like the nineteenth-century Cherokees, the Creeks often used these terms to "indicate cultural orientation and upbringing," but few people ever fit into a simple "either or" binary.[65] Kinship connections rather than racial makeup typically determined the privileged minority chosen to attend the institutions. Because their subsequent education provided students with more social, economic, and political opportunities within the Creek Nation, the schools further served to reinforce a social hierarchy.

The composition of the boarding schools during their early years of operation reflect a more complicated representation of Creek youths than simply an assemblage of "mixed blood" scions. Although missionaries encouraged students to speak English, practice Christianity, and behave like white children, the lack of white blood did not preclude students from attending. During its early years, Tullahassee admitted eighty pupils "many of them 'half breeds,'" but still maintained a majority of "full Indians

[63] Loughridge, "History of Mission Work," 30.
[64] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 120.
[65] Rose Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 13-14.

speaking not English."[66] Likewise, at Asbury, Wash Grayson found himself in the minority, remarking "As Indians are never red haired or blondes, I was an exception, being also quite white in complexion, and always regretted being as I was – white and red headed."[67] Over a century of considerable intermixing between Creeks, African Americans and Euro-Americans had blurred racial identities among students.

In 1851, thirty-five students with diverse racial backgrounds comprised the student body at Coweta. The superintendent described nine of the students as "full Indian," "perhaps full Indian," or "nearly full Indian." He labelled four others as Indian "with maybe a little white blood." Eleven of the students were "part white" and "part Indian" to varying degrees. Two of these were part white, part Creek, and part Cherokee but qualified as Creek citizens. Only one of the students was fully white, but she too was a Creek citizen. The list clearly shows the complex identity of students within the Creek manual labor schools, as well as the broader demography of the Creek Nation by the mid-nineteenth century. Moreover, the slippery and often uncertain language used to qualify the racial composition of the students—"perhaps," "maybe," and "a little"—further demonstrates the blurred racial lines in Creek society.[68] Even at the time, Euro-American observers and Creeks could not easily categorize people as "mixed bloods" and "full bloods" based on phenotypes, cultural orientations, or family histories.

Despite evidence of fluid identities during the 1850s, racial distinctions became more rigid during the decade. While the United States stood on the brink of sectional conflict, southern states passed increasingly restrictive slave codes in order to preserve

[66] Bass, *The Story of Tullahassee*, 52.
[67] Grayson, *Warrior for the Confederacy*, 45.
[68] List of Kowetah Students, PHS, roll 16, no. 150.

the oppressive racial hierarchy and prevent slave insurrection. The Creek Nation, with its growing population of slaves and free blacks, was not insulated from the escalating tension. In the Creek Nation, wealthy slaveholders, who depended on the exploitation of slave labor, wielded considerable political power. They worked to pass restrictions on the rights and opportunities of slaves and free blacks. The council excluded anyone who was more than half-African even if born to a Creek mother, meaning they no longer received annuity payments or had access to Creek institutions, including schools. It also prohibited any abolitionists from serving as teachers in the schools.[69]

The tightening slave codes and restrictions during the 1850s coincided with "growing hostility to black Indian education" and a "concerted effort on the part of Creek slaveholders to root out Afro-Indian children from the sectarian schools in the nation."[70] This included the diverse class at the Coweta School. During the early 1850s, the Coweta School continued to operate under the agreement Robert Loughridge had forged with the Creek Council in the 1840s, under which the school received money from Creek annuities. Although the Tullahassee and Asbury schools operated under the more recent contracts that stipulated trustees made student selections, the missionary teachers at Coweta admitted students. In April 1851, however, the Creek agent Colonel Raiford refused to sign Superintendent H. Templeton's quarterly report for the Coweta school. Raiford's refusal prevented the school from "receiving aid from the United States," which came out of Creek annuity payments. The reason for this sudden withdrawal of funding stemmed from the objections of some Creeks that "some

[69] Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 39-40.

[70] Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian,* 78.

children who are one fourth African have been admitted by the missionaries." They would not agree "to have their money appropriated to such schools."[71]

The Presbyterian missionaries, Colonel Raiford, and the Creek leaders used racial discourse to debate whether certain Creeks with African heritage should be granted the privilege of attending the school. When Raiford accused the missionaries of admitting "half negroes" at Coweta, the missionaries replied that they had "none of that kind." However, they did have five students who were "one fourth part African blood." In a plea to Luke Lea, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Reverend Templeton argued that these five children were "citizens of the Creek Nation" and asked, "Would it be right to exclude a portion of its citizens from the privileges of the school?"[72] The Creek leaders met in council and drafted a statement to Lea in which they "unhesitatingly and unanimously" agreed that Colonel Raiford "was acting in accordance with the wishes of the nation." They informed the commissioner that their contract with the Presbyterians to open Tullahassee voided the previous agreement for Coweta and that the school should no longer receive support from their national funds.[73] The leaders' move centralized the power to determine who attended schools and who did not in the hands of Creek trustees and reinforced the council's authority over the schools.

Creek antagonism to Afro-Creek schooling coincided with white opposition to black schooling in both the North and the South during the antebellum period. Horace Mann's common school movement "did little to ensure that black people would be included – let alone included equally." According to historian Hilary J. Moss, the

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[71] J. Ross Ramsey to Walter Lowrie, November 13, 1851, PHS, roll 16, no. 98.

[72] H. Templeton to the Secretary of Indian Affairs, November 23, 1851, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, microcopy M234, roll 785, slide 1444.

[73] Creek Chiefs in Council to Luke Lea, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1851, Letters Received by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Microcopy M234, roll 786, slide 50-51.

common school movement "empowered white children, but it also reinforced white efforts to withhold civil rights from African Americans." Although both slaves and free blacks throughout the United States worked to secure their own educational opportunities, sometimes at great personal risk, Euro-Americans simultaneously attempted to "expel blacks from the body politic." As public schools expanded and became the key mechanism for training virtuous citizens, white opposition to African American education intensified.[74] Elite Creeks increasingly worked to exclude individuals with high degrees of African ancestry from their own nation during the same period. Several factors influenced the subjugation of African American and Afro-Creeks and their exclusion them from institutions, including increasing racism and a desire to present the nation as "civilized." Creek leaders also used it as an opportunity to exercise political sovereignty by defining who belonged and who did not.

The use of African-Creek and slave labor at the schools reinforced the intersection between racial and class divisions within the social hierarchy. The missionaries frequently rented and at times even purchased slaves. At Coweta, slaves' presence highlighted clear demarcations between white teachers, Indian students, and African laborers. "A little row of cabins where the negroes worked" stood separate from the main school building where the staff and students worked and resided.[75] "Uncle Frank," a blind black man, occupied one of the cabins. He worked in the school's millhouse, where he used an iron hand mill to grind all the meal and hominy for bread to feed the students.[76]

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[74] Moss, *Schooling Citizens*, 13.
[75] "Coweta Mission was eighteen miles west of Tullahassee....," series I, box 2, folder 2, AMRC.
[76] Loomis, *Scenes of Indian Country*, 43-44.

Slavery and the marginalization of Afro-Creeks as a labor source underwrote the daily lives of students at the schools, as well as the slaves who toiled there. Robin Foster, a "black man who was hired by the month to work on the farm" as an interpreter. The missionaries paid Foster's master eight dollars a week to rent his labor. Although he was illiterate and described as "very ignorant," he could speak both English and Muskogee. He served an important intermediate role as interpreter between missionaries and their congregation.[77] After Foster's master retrieved him from the school for a period, the Presbyterian missionaries borrowed money from the Seminole chief John Jumper to purchase him for $800.[78] At the school, he lived in his own separate cabin furnished with a stool, a chair, a tool chest that doubled as a table, and a bed made of poles fastened to the wall. At the end of the day, he would make tools "as a way of overwork, to earn pocket money for himself." Foster once relayed to a missionary a Creek oral story that indicates he was firmly aware of his social status in comparison to whites and Creeks. According to Foster's narrative, three men, a white, a black, and a red man, "travelled till they came to a place where the Great Spirit had deposited a great variety of articles, arranged in three separate parcels." The white man chose the package with maps, papers, and pens while the Indian chose the parcel with bows, arrows, beads, and feathers. Thus, "there was nothing left for the poor black man but the spades, hoes, and grubbing hoes."[79] Foster's account of this story highlights the

[77] "James Ross Ramsay Autobiography," James Ross Ramsay Collection, Seminole Nation Papers, Native American Manuscripts, WHC, 21.

[78] "James Ross Ramsay Autobiography," James Ross Ramsay Collection, Seminole Nation Papers, Native American Manuscripts, *WHC*, 39-40.

[79] Loomis, *Scenes of Indian Country*, 55-56.

level to which racial ideology pervaded Creek society and reinforced a structure of inequality.[80]

The reliance on slave labor at the mission schools underscored a hierarchy of class and race. Education became the realm of Creek students. Meanwhile, elite Creeks increasingly excluded Afro-Creeks from these social spaces. Slaves provided the only welcomed form of black presence at the schools and did so in the form of unfree, exploitable labor. The social hierarchy that structured the Creek schools both reflected and reinforced the growing divisions in Creek society and the changing definitions of Creek identity.

As the manual labor schools became increasingly exclusive institutions based on race, class, and kinship, it became apparent that they would not fill the new demands of citizens for access to education. While Tullahassee and Asbury together accommodated approximately one hundred and sixty students, this represented only a small, privileged fraction of Creek children. Neighborhood schools, like those opening in the Cherokee Nation, had the potential to make basic education available for the majority of youths. Thus, local leaders worked to fill the gaps by opening new schools in towns throughout

[80] Some evidence does suggests, however, that working in the schools offered slaves increased opportunities to exercise agency than under Creek or white plantation masters. Robin Foster learned the sermons he interpreted, worshiped Christianity freely, and became interested in theology. The missionary teachers also allowed him some autonomy in his routine activities. For example, every other week, he rode alone to spend the day with his wife. Loomis, *Scenes of Indian Country*, 57. In another instance, a slave woman whose master had hired her out to work at Tullahassee, used the school as an opportunity to escape the clutches of her owner. A week before the school opened, her master "determined to take her out of the country and sell her." Not wishing to leave, the woman appealed to the missionaries to buy her from her master instead of contracting her labor. Loughridge and Robertson found themselves in a bind. "We did not know what to do…The people & the Gov. too were expecting us to make a beginning in the school & we felt it almost impossible to commence if we failed to secure her help," explained Loughridge. Her labor, in short, proved critical to the function of the school. Even before receiving permission from the Board of Foreign Missions, the missionaries at Loughridge purchased the woman for $400. They planned to reimburse themselves from the wages they otherwise would have paid to her master. Although the woman remained a slave, she skillfully appealed to the missionaries to escape sale to an unknown master. Robert Loughridge to Walter Lowrie, April 16, 1850, PHS, roll 16, no. 12.

Creek country. Previously educated individuals played an instrumental role in establishing this alternative to the manual labor schools.

By the 1850s, a handful of Creek neighborhoods were already familiar with the neighborhood school model. A few locally initiated schools operated during the 1840s, though they did not do so under any formal authority of the Creek Council. In 1842, for instance, four Upper Creek leaders, Tomarthle Micco, Tuckebatche Micco, Jim Boy, and David Barnett, a former Choctaw Academy student, oversaw an examination of the students in a Tuckabatchee day school. Major John H. Broadnax, a white man who had led a company of Creeks to Indian Territory during removal, taught the school. They asked three other white men living within the Creek Nation to witness the examination and report to the agent that the children "are in fine progress of learning." The townsmen appealed to the agent to serve as a patron of the local school and "use his influence to pay for books."[81] At the request of the leader of the Upper Towns, Broadnax also supplied a report to the agent. He explained that within three months of opening, the number of scholars, who increased from seven to seventeen, made considerable advancements in their studies. "Their progress in learning is beyond anything I could expect," he stated. The local leaders had urged him to send a report so that the agent would "assist in procuring remuneration."[82] Like those in Tuckabatchee, interest in neighborhood schools grew among members of other towns.

For example, the residents of Big Bottom petitioned the Creek Council for a school. They stated, "Being possessed of some education ourselves, we do appreciate and understand its advantages, and we moreover do pledge ourselves to afford all the

[81] "Tuckebachee, 26, August, 1842." box 38, vol. 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

[82] "Report of John Broadnax to Agent Dawson," n.d., box 38, vol. 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

assistance that lies in our power to making the school full and complete."[83] In another petition, popular Methodist minister Samuel Checote and ten others from Spring Hill town requested that the federal government "employ moral & good men to teach our Public schools." They explained, "We have had the advantage of Schools and good ones too. Some of us attended the Choctaw School in Kentucky and the rest of us have been taught by missionary teachers." As a result, they "felt a great interest for the welfare of our Nation & people."[84] They envisioned education as a crucial component of their nation's future.

In particular, a small number of so-called "full-blood" Creeks who had received formal education served as powerful education advocates in more culturally conservative communities. This included John Davis who attended Withington Station, Samuel Checote who attended Asbury Mission, and Goliath Herrod who attended Choctaw Academy. As a result, support for neighborhood schools that would benefit all sectors of society, rather than a disproportionate number of affluent families, increased. As agent James Logan noted, "A spirit of improvement exists, among what are termed the, 'Common Indians.'" He reported to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs "they are not only willing to receive but are favorably inclined to instruction, in both, but that they fully appreciate the happy results and consequences arising from their encouragement of them."[85] In fact, in the 1840s, a neighborhood school began to operate in Spring Hill and thirty pupils, "for the most part full bloods," regularly attended. After a visit in 1845, agent Logan observed "They are as cheerful and attractive a set of scholars, as I ever saw in any country, they are cleanly and decent in

[83] "Petition from the citizens of Big Bottom," box 38, vol. 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.
[84] "Letter from Creek citizens" box 38, vol. 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.
[85] "Report of Creek Agent, 1845," box 38, vol. 8, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.

their appearance and display great affection for their teachers, and are rapidly progressing in their studies."[86]

The successes of these few early neighborhood schools gave further credence to the belief that they could serve as a viable alternative to missionary schools as part of a formal Creek school system. One teacher noted, "Education is steadily becoming a subject of deeper interest, and is gaining a firmer hold, on the affections of the Creek people," yet many children throughout the Creek Nation lived in isolated areas.[87] Some parents even moved their families and households to be closer to neighborhood schools so that all of their children could attend classes.[88] D.B. Aspberry, the Couchartee day school teacher noted in 1853, "The Creeks are very anxious to have day schools to be located in the neighborhood where there are a sufficiency of children to justify such locations."[89] By 1853, four day schools, in addition to Asbury, Tullahassee, and Coweta, and the Baptist mission school at North Fork, operated with the nation.[90]

As the neighborhood schools opened, the first generation of educated Creek teachers worked directly to school their fellow community members. They represented a new cohort whose English literacy and intellectual capacities could be put to use for the good of the Creek people. Thomas Carr stepped into that role when he agreed to teach a school located in the far western portion of the Creek Nation in the Lower Creek town of Cusseta. Carr, a member of the Cusseta town, had been among the dozens of Creek boys educated at Choctaw Academy in Kentucky before removal. Anxious for their children to receive "the benefits of the school they had been promised," people

[86] "Report of Creek Agent, 1845," box 38, vol. 81, Grant Foreman Collection, GM.
[87] D.B. Aspberry to W.H. Garrett, Creek Agent, July 24, 1853, *ARCIA*, 1853, 390.
[88] For example, see Grayson, Warrior for the Confederacy, 41.
[89] D.B. Aspberry to W.H. Garrett, Creek Agent, July 24, 1853, *ARCIA*, 1853, 390.
[90] See Reports on Creek Schools, *ARCIA*, 1853, 388-395.

ranging as far as twenty miles outside of the neighborhood enlisted Carr to rent a building and lead a school until they could construct a permanent facility. He took note of the clear shift in Creek attitudes toward schools. He remarked that his town, which had consisted of predominantly "full-blood Indians" until quite recently, had "been the most noted for their prejudice and opposition to all reform…as well as their unqualified hostility to education and the religion of the great white man." Instead, he now found "nothing can exceed the interest they manifest in my school."[91]

Indeed, the customarily conservative members of the Cusseta town made the new school a central part of their community. Children flocked to the school from up to eighteen miles away in this isolated portion of the nation. During the first term, the building accommodated thirty-five pupils, including twenty-three males and twelve females ranging in age from seven to eighteen. Their parents played an active role in their learning experience. The day school's close proximity to their homes made direct oversight of their children's education much more feasible. Carr wrote, "There is hardly a day that passes but what the school-house is thronged by the parents of the children who do everything to inspire the children with ambition to excel each other in their studies." [92] As an educated, English-literate Creek, Carr demonstrated a clear sense of duty in passing his skills and knowledge along to his town members. He explained, "I once like my little pupils – could not speak a word in the English language; but the school and my kind teachers made a wonderful change in me, and taught me to speak and write in the English language."[93] The close involvement of the Cusseta community and Carr's role as a homegrown, Creek teacher working among his

[91] Thomas Carr to W.H. Garrett, August 20, 1853, *ARCIA*, 1853, 394-395.
[92] Thomas Carr to W.H. Garrett, August 20, 1853, *ARCIA*, 1853, 394-395.
[93] Thomas Carr to W.H. Garrett, August 20, 1853, *ARCIA*, 1853, 394-395.

own townspeople highlights the emergence of grassroots desire for neighborhood schools.

By the mid-1850s, the demand for day schools in various neighborhoods intensified and several new ones opened. In 1855, twelve neighborhood schools "located by the chiefs in the towns most populous and able to sustain them" operated in the nation. These included towns such as Hitchet, Chehaw, Tallassa, Hlob-Hlocco, Choaska, Deep Fork Tuleva Thloco, and Hillube, many of these being the first schools in particular portions of Creek country. The Hlob-Hlocco school, for instance, was located on the "extreme frontier" near Comanche territory, and all but one of the students were "natives of the whole blood."[94] Although often remote, these day schools proved successful in providing opportunities for English literacy that had not previously been available to a wide portion of the population. Whereas the manual labor schools privileged the children of families oriented toward Euro-American culture by requiring that they spoke English upon acceptance, the day schools afforded non-English speaking students the opportunity to learn to read and write.

Despite the expansion in the number of neighborhood schools, these local institutions struggled with a number of obstacles in their earliest years. Some neighborhoods like Cusseta held classes in temporary and insufficient facilities. The teacher at the Deep Fork Tuleva Thloco school reported to the agent, "We labored under some disadvantages, being under the necessity of occupying a meeting house, which was very unsuitable and uncomfortable."[95] Intense drought conditions and famine also hampered the progress of schools in some neighborhoods. Mary Lewis,

[94] Reports on Creek Schools, *ARCIA*, 1855, 461-471.
[95] W.H. Allen to W.H. Garrett, September 5, 1855, *ARCIA*, 1855, 469.

who taught a school for Euchee [Yuchi] children at the time, reported a "great suffering from scarcity of food."[96] Even though the day schools were located closer to students' homes, many still had to travel significant distances across the countryside. Distance, famine, illness, and familial obligations also prevented some students from traveling to the school each day. Cultural differences in childrearing further contributed to irregular attendance. Whereas teachers assumed children should be in class every day, many parents did not use force or coercion to make their children attend.

White contemporaries pointed to these problems as a failure of the Creeks' progress towards "civilization," but did not understand the reasons for them. For instance, Robert M. Loughridge reported to federal officials that the neighborhood schools were unsuccessful and pushed them to use their authority to mandate boarding school education instead. He argued, "I have strongly urged the importance of manual labor boarding schools, as the only system suited to the present state of society among the Creeks and Seminoles."[97] Historians have largely privileged contemporary Euro-Americans' colonial gaze in their interpretations of the neighborhood schools. At best, they dismiss them as insignificant, and at worst, they label them as failed experiments. For instance, Grant Foreman stated:

> As soon as the novelty of going to school was over…they deserted the schoolroom…The teachers could not bring them back and the parents who exercised no discipline whatever over their children, would not, and hence they absented themselves at pleasure…This was the testimony also of teachers and missionaries laboring among the Cherokee and Choctaw for more than thirty years.[98]

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[96] M. J. Lewis to W.H. Garrett, August 28, 1855, *ARCIA*, 1855, 468.

[97] R.M Loughridge to W.H. Garret, September 13, 1859. *ARCIA*, 1859, 549-550.

[98] Grant Foreman, *The Five Civilized Tribes* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1934), 206-207. In his history of early Creek schools Roland Hinds, for instance, cited missionary David Eakins to argue that "The manual labor schools probably kept the Indian children under the influence of the missionaries longer, and thus gave the children more opportunity to forget Indian mores and

Euro-American missionaries and early Oklahoma historians, such as Foreman, failed to interpret the day schools in Indian Territory within the broader context of education in the antebellum U.S. Education reports from Northern states during the 1840s and 1850s feature an overwhelming number of grievances over school conditions. These included "Short terms, irregular attendance, bad facilities, shortsighted and penurious district control, poor teachers, insufficient supervision, lack of uniformity, and indifferent parental support were among the chief complaints."[99] Thus, the struggles of the early Creek day schools were not unique to the Creeks, nor did they represent a failure of attempts at "progress" and "civilization." Instead, they were characteristic of primary school education in the United States at the time. Like their Euro-American counterparts, Creek politicians and educators took note of these problems and attempted to implement reform.

Unlike schools for white children in the states, however, Creek schools designed to teach English literacy faced a particularly challenging obstacle: the language barrier. Although Thomas Carr and other Creek teachers served in several day schools, non-Muskogee speaking teachers taught others. This posed a serious obstacle for any children who did not understand the English language. Americus L. Hay, the white teacher at the Tuckabatchee, found the language barrier between himself and his students to be a challenge. Indignant, he wrote the Creek agent, "As I informed you last year, we are much hindered in teaching because the scholars do not understand English, and I am assured it should be required for the children to speak English." This decision,

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superstitions," than the neighborhood schools. Roland Hinds, "Early Creek Missions," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 17:1 (March, 1939).

[99] Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic*, 106.

however, was not Hay's to make. Thomas Carr recognized the problem, noting, "Teachers who do not understand the Creek have many difficulties to encounter in their efforts to educate Creek children." He even felt challenged by the fact that his students only seemed to want to speak the English language at his insistence. Rather than trying to exclude them, Carr experimented with a different approach. He selected two or more students who had a good grasp of English and encouraged them to lead by example.[100]

Despite these various obstacles, Creeks belonging to towns with diverse cultural orientations and geographic locations embraced the neighborhood school models. The day schools served as a mechanism for educating a broader swath of Creek children, who did not necessarily belong to the most economically affluent, and politically powerful families. By diversifying and expanding the types of schooling funded by the nation, the Creek Council ensured that it served as the primary facilitator of Creek education, rather than the federal government.

In 1856, Creek leaders took further steps to solidify their control over schools and to expand educational opportunities. In a treaty negotiated with the Seminoles and the United States, the Creek government sold a tract of land to the Seminoles in exchange for additional annuities. The treaty stipulated that, "It being the desire of the Creeks to employ their own teachers," they would control their own education funding. It also included a clause that specified that the federal government would pay the Creek treasurer annuities whenever the Creek Council directed, and thereafter it would

[100] Thomas Carr to W.H. Garret, September 15, 1855, *ARCIA*, 1855, 470-471.

allocate the money. This move secured an education fund controlled by the Creek government.[101]

The council then took the next steps to expand and consolidate control over the day school system. It opened seven new neighborhood schools in the Arkansas and the Canadian settlements and created the bureaucratic position of Superintendent of Schools for each district. The political division between the Arkansas and Canadian districts the indicated continued structuring presence of Upper and Lower towns. Thus, Creek institutions remained distinctly Creek even as they underwent ongoing reform. Nevertheless, the education reforms reflect the ongoing centralization of the Creek political institutions under the authority of a national governing body. As this process unfolded, Creek schools began to resemble more closely the common schools already established by the Cherokee and Choctaw Nations.[102]

The creation of the two new positions – Superintendent of Schools for the Arkansas District and Superintendent of Schools for the Canadian District – also marked a shift in authority over Creek education from federal oversight to Creek oversight. The Creek superintendents assumed direct responsibility for oversight of the Creek schools in each district. James M.C. Smith accepted the superintendency of the Canadian District, and Goliath Herrod, a graduate of Choctaw Academy, oversaw the Arkansas District. They tracked attendance, pupils' progress, and the overall effectiveness of the neighborhood schools and reported to the national council on their

[101] "Treaty with the Creeks, etc. 1856," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II*, ed. by Charles Joseph Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 760.

[102] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 121.

progress.[103] Thus, the Creek Council also limited the supervisory capacity of the Creek agent and the federal government over education.

In addition to controlling the funding and administration of these first neighborhood schools, the Creek Council also followed the example of the Cherokee and Choctaw governments by decreasing dependency on white educators. In 1856, the Cherokee Superintendent of Public Schools reported, "I have made it a rule to employ native teachers educated at our own schools in preference to others." He considered it a duty of his office to "give the graduates a trial as teachers of the common schools." Indeed, that year Cherokee teachers directed all but three of the twenty-one common schools.[104] The Creek Council followed suit and encouraged graduates of the manual labor schools to teach the new neighborhood schools. Thus, the manual labor schools became a mechanism for expanding schools in the Creek Nation by providing the first generation of homegrown Creek teachers. Some, including Mary Lewis and Robert Carr, had already taken up this task, and more joined their ranks in the years to come. Whereas white, Christian teachers continued to direct the manual labor schools under contract with missionary societies, the early neighborhood schools became environments where Creek students learned directly from indigenous teachers. The public role of educated Creek superintendents of schools and teachers also reinforced the emerging ideology that the future of the Creek Nation depended on a new generation of educated leaders and citizens.

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[103] G. Herrod to Col. Garrett, September 8, 1858, *ARCIA*, 1858, 499; James M.C. Smith, September 24, 1858, *ARCIA*, 1858, 500-501.

[104] W.A. Duncan, Superintendent of Public Schools, to the National Council, *ARCIA*, 1856, 693-694.

After schools fell under the supervision of the Creek government, the number of pupils in the fourteen Creek day schools increased. In 1855, an estimated three hundred students attended the day schools that operated under the direction of the Creek agent. By 1858, however, the two superintendents reported 403 neighborhood school students. According to the two Creek superintendents, several of the students mastered the alphabet and English literacy and moved on to more advanced subjects, including history, geography, and arithmetic. As Smith observed, the progress of the pupils "has been fully equal to that of any children which considering that many were entirely ignorant of the English language, induces some hopes for the future." Smith and Herrod also noted a clear shift in parent who had previously been resistant to western-style schools. In regards to education, they began "awakening to a more lively interest in their children's welfare and improvement" as they tested the new neighborhood schools.[105] Thus, the early experiments with neighborhood schools yielded positive results, especially after Creek officials assumed control over their funding and administration.

In addition to the manual labor schools and the day schools, the Creek Council also tested another avenue of education for Creek citizens. Beginning in 1854, the nation funded a handful of students to attend colleges in the states "where the advantages of obtaining an English education were better." The council selected promising boarding school for this honor. Unlike many elite, southern whites who attended academies and universities on their families' dime, the Creek Nation subsidized college education. In 1854, the council sponsored one student to attend

[105] Col. Garrett to C.W. Dean, Supt. of Indian Affairs, August 24, 1855, *ARCIA*, 1855, 458; G. Herrod to Col. Garrett, September 8, 1858, *ARCIA*, 1858, 499; James M.C. Smith, September 24, 1858, *ARCIA*, 1858, 501.

Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, where other students of the Five Tribes, including Goliath Herrod had previously studied. The other initial scholarship students attended Arkansas College, a new non-sectarian institute of higher learning chartered in Fayetteville, Arkansas.[106]

Three students, Richard Carr, Ely Danley, and Lyman Moore, matriculated at Arkansas College. A fourth, David Yargee, soon joined them in March. Although the students required some preliminary instruction "in the elements of our vernacular," according to the college's president, the scholars' progress soon "merited all praise." They even earned honors at the annual examination. As the young men excelled in their studies, they also adjusted socially; they "gained the universal goodwill of all their companions" and "won the confidence and esteem of everyone connected with the school."[107] Over the next few years, additional young Creek men joined those at Arkansas College, including Ben Marshall, Jr., Lewis Miller, Billy McIntosh, and Eli Jacobs.[108]

Kinship and political connections, in addition to students' aptitude, typically determined whom the council selected to receive scholarships. Places were "dealt to the relatives, sons, etc., of persons of influence." Selected students, from both Upper and Lower towns, had influential friends and families in the affairs of the nation.[109] In 1859, leaders selected sixteen-year-old Wash Grayson as the next promising youth to

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[106] W.H. Garrett to C.W. Dean, Supt. of Indian Affairs, August 24, 1855, *ARCIA*, 458.

[107] Robert Graham, President of Arkansas College, to W.H. Garrett, September 8, 1855, *ARCIA*, 1855, 459-460.

[108] Grayson, *Warrior for the Confederacy*, 46-47.

[109] Ben Marshall, Jr., for instance, was the son of the Benjamin Marshall, the treasurer of the Creek Nation. David Yarghee was the grandson of the powerful pre-removal Upper town chief, Big Warrior. Eli Danley came from the "aristocratic and governing town of Tuckabatchee," while Lewis Miller came from a "prominent family of the Cowetas." Billy McIntosh, the son of William McIntosh and half-brother of Chilly McIntosh, hailed from the most powerful family in Creek country. Grayson, *Warrior for the Confederacy*, 46-48.

earn a scholarship from the Creek Nation. Although Wash had distinguished himself as a scholar at Asbury, he believed his appointment resulted from his mother's connections to Moty Kennard, the newly elected principal chief of the Arkansas District. The fact that the Creek Council selected Grayson and others from the most affluent and politically influential families, insured that these up and coming leaders would reinforce rather than overturn the social hierarchy that structured Creek society by the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, Grayson had several cousins of lower economic standing and African blood who did not receive the same educational opportunities afforded to him.[110]

In his memoir, Wash Grayson provides insight into what he and the other scholars experienced while they were away at school. He found himself "completely struck with awe and wonderment" at his new environment, which differed considerably from his previous school experience at Asbury. Immediately, he noticed that the other students neither spoke Native languages, had "jet black hair and eyes" like most of his former classmates, nor wore clothes in the same style as his. Because Wash had light skin and red hair, he likely resembled many other students, but cultural differences made him feel isolated and uncomfortable. He likened his encounters to being a child on display "at the side show of a circus, the ugly specimen of humanity said by the obliging manager to be the only living 'Wild man of Borneo.'" This took an emotional toll on the young man who "felt completely isolated from anyone whom I might appeal to for sympathy or comfort." Initially, overcome with loneliness and self-consciousness, Wash kept to himself and did not engage in any social activities with other students. Although he forged bonds with the two other Creeks in attendance,

[110] Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian*, 80.

Billy McIntosh and Eli Jacobs, as well as with Saladen Watie, the son of Cherokee leader Stand Watie, it still took him some time to feel comfortable socializing with them in the unfamiliar environment.[111]

After a couple of months, however, Grayson began to adjust to his new surroundings. He ordered a suit from the tailor to match the styles of his Euro-American peers; he began to engage with other students; and he worked hard on his studies. In time, he came to be "identified with and active in most of the enterprises that engaged the attention" of the other students. At the close of the school term, Grayson returned home to his parents, who were satisfied with his "general appearance and supposed advancement in the college course." Though the secession crisis escalated and rumors of a war between the states circulated through Creek country, his parents decided that, because of his progress, he would return to the school. During his second year, Grayson felt much more comfortable with college life and the customs of his Euro-American peers and teachers. As Grayson explained, "I had now become well acquainted with the people and their ways and manners, and being freely accorded entree to some of the best families where I enjoyed the amenities and hospitality of the refined, I was in this way very much benefitted. I embraced the Christian church." He also continued to succeed in his studies, which included "Arithmetic, English grammar and other elementary branches…Algebra, Latin grammar," demonstrating a high degree of proficiency in languages.[112]

Grayson and the other young Creek men who attended during the late 1850s displayed the intellectual capacities of indigenous scholars to Euro-American

[111] Grayson, *Warrior for the Confederacy*, 52-53.
[112] Grayson, *Warrior for the Confederacy*, 54-55.

contemporaries, as well as the degree to which Creeks had adapted aspects of Euro-American social, political, and economic practices to fit their own needs. Yet, they simultaneously challenged the correlation between education and assimilation. They were groomed to return home and excel in business or politics, contributing to the economic growth and political survival of their nation, instead of remaining in the states.

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Grayson represented everything that the Creek Council hoped to create by expanding English education opportunities for their citizens. Rather than abandoning his country and people in exchange for white society, he returned to his nation. In the late nineteenth century, he went on to distinguish himself as a prominent Creek politician and eventually assumed the role of Principal Chief. He became a vocal Creek nationalist and worked throughout his career to protect sovereignty from colonial policies. When he returned home from Arkansas College in spring of 1861, however, his future and the future of his nation seemed anything but certain.[113]

Trouble loomed as the American Civil War commenced. Everything that Creeks had worked to rebuild in the decades since removal, including the manual labor schools and the neighborhood schools, fell under threat. Federal officials violated numerous treaties in 1861 when they withheld annuity payments to the Creek Nation to prevent the money from falling into Confederate hands. The schools shut down and children returned to their homes. Fearing abolitionist activities, the council ordered the missionary teachers to leave the nation. The experimental forms of education that had emerged over the past two decades came to a sudden halt. The Creek Nation was not

[113] Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation,* 53.

alone. Schools throughout the North and the South shut their doors as the war enveloped states and people turned their attention from education to survival. Creek leaders, parents, and students, however, had firmly planted the roots of an education system that provided a foundation for rebuilding after the war.

CHAPTER THREE:

EDUCATIONAL POLITICS DURING RECONSTRUCTION

The American Civil War triggered internal conflict in Creek country. As a result, the promise of an educated, prosperous, and politically stable nation seemed to fade. Former scholars became entrenched in combat instead of studies. For instance, Robert Leslie, a Tullahassee alumnus, left the mission to join the Confederate Army where came face to face with the realities of war. Union forces captured and held him at Alton Prison in Illinois. Leslie gained his freedom by joining the Union Army after six months in prison. Longing for home, he wrote to his former teachers, William and Ann Eliza Robertson, requesting they send him a Bible and copies of the texts they produced in his native language. He also learned of the deaths of old schoolmates in his correspondence with the Robertsons. Witnessing the chaos and destruction around him, he wrote morose lines of poetry such as "Reflect on me as the dead, And think my heart is buried."[1] Like Leslie, the majority of Creek citizens suffered immensely during the war.

The conflict also reopened the wounds of factionalism. On July 10, 1861, at North Fork town, a group of Creek delegates signed a treaty with the Confederacy, but they did so without the formal consent of the Creek Council. The delegation included several prominent, educated men such as Samuel Checote, George W. Stidham, James M.C. Smith, D.N. McIntosh, and Timothy Barnett, as well as principal chief Moty Kennard.[2] They believed the Confederate delegates' promise that the U.S. would be

[1] Wiles, Robert Leslie. "Robert Leslie Wiles Journal, 1862-1865," Special Collections, Newberry Library.

[2] Treaty with the Creek Nation, July 10, 1861: Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. "As Long As Grass Shall Grow and Water Run: The Treaties Formed by the Confederate States of America and the

defeated and that the Confederacy would insure the Creeks' protection and annuity payments. Meanwhile, the elderly but still powerful Opothle Yahola and his followers opposed a Confederate alliance and wished to uphold their standing treaties with the U.S. These Loyal Creeks met in council, declared Sands (Oktarharsars) as the acting principal chief, and appealed to the federal government to maintain its treaty promises to protect their nation from outsiders. Under threat from opposing forces, Opothle Yahola and a large number of Upper Creek followers fled to Kansas where they lived in a refugee camp. Like Robert Leslie, former students and scholars of the mission schools, including George Washington Grayson, Pleasant Porter, Sanford Perryman and many other promising young men, split their loyalties between the factions of Southern Creeks and the Loyal Creeks. Subsequently, the government fell into disarray.[3]

Like those throughout Southern states, Creek schools closed as war arrived on their doorsteps. For instance, Tullahassee, the prize of the Creek Nation, shut down, and the Creek Council expelled its missionary teachers from the nation. Rather than accommodating a new generation of Creek children, the building housed wounded soldiers and livestock as it was converted into a hospital and stables. The occupying troops hauled off supplies--including bricks from the walls--to use for the war effort. In the aftermath, the school was left in "ruin and destruction," and "a row of graves nearby

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tribes in Indian Territory. Digitized CSA Treaties with the Five Tribes. American Indian Treaties Portal. University of Nebraska Lincoln. http://csaindiantreaties.unl.edu/index.html.

[3] Over 3,168 Creeks, 777 Seminoles, 53 Creek slaves, 38 free black-Creeks, and refugees from other tribes joined Opothle Yahola. See Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1941), 145-150. For a detailed history of Creek involvement in the Civil War see Christine Shultz White and Benton R. White, *Now the Wolf has Come: The Creek Nation in the Civil War* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996). Also see Mary Jane Warde, *When the Wolf Came: The Civil War and Indian Territory* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2013) for a discussion of the Creek Nation in the context of the larger Civil War in Indian Territory

added to the gloom."[4] The new generation of Creek children, who should have had the opportunity to attend the mission schools and neighborhood schools during this time, suffered. Many became refugees and orphans while others succumbed to disease, hunger, and death. In one grim scene, an observer witnessed a girl carrying a human skull, one of many that littered the prairie.[5] The school days experienced by many students before the war had abruptly ended.

In the post-war Creek Nation, however, schools not only reopened but also thrived as leaders initiated a new era of nation-building. As with removal over three decades before, Creeks faced another period of rebuilding while they simultaneously confronted new threats. Like the United States, the Creek Nation remained politically divided as citizens faced the daunting task of reuniting and recovering. At the same time, the federal government intensified attempts to implement colonial policies designed to strip Native nations of their sovereignty. Thus, members of the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole nations became subject to a federally dictated Reconstruction that restricted their national autonomy, whether or not they had supported the Union or the Confederacy.[6] Creeks negotiated a new treaty with the U.S. in 1866 that imposed harsh measures, including land cessions and the allowance for railroad right-of-ways. The terms also stipulated that all the newly emancipated slaves, who comprised approximately ten percent of the population, must be granted citizenship. Some Creeks, including many Sands' followers, supported this measure,

[4] "James Ross Ramsay Autobiography," James Ross Ramsay Collection, Seminole Nation Papers, Native American Manuscripts, WHC, 67-68.

[5] Alice M. Robertson, "Incidents in the Civil War," Alice Robertson Papers, OHS.

[6] Jeff Fortney, "Lest We Remember: Civil War Memory and Commemoration among the Five Tribes," *American Indian Quarterly* 36 (Fall, 2012), 530.

while many others did not.[7] Despite their various internal divides, Reconstruction marked a period nation-building for the Creeks, during which they worked to create "stronger and more culturally informed government, economic, and community institutions" so that they could "realize their values culture, and interests."[8]

As part of the larger Creek nation-building process, the education system became a central political institution.[9] This chapter examines this development by exploring the relationship between Creek education, politics, and nationhood from 1865 to 1878. First, political reform allowed the nascent school system to develop into a full-fledged national institution. Second, Creeks who had been educated before the war quickly rose to positions of political leadership and, in turn, continued to expand national education. Because of these changes, diverse sectors of Creek society - including progressive nationalists, political conservatives, and newly emancipated freedman - entered into ongoing debates over the nature of education in the Creek Nation and its various social, economic, and political implications. The opposing political parties approached education reform with their own agendas. Nevertheless,

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[7] See Annie Abel, *The American Indian under Reconstruction* (New York: Arthur H. Clark, 1925) and Minnie Thomas Bailey, *Reconstruction in Indian Territory: A Story of Avarice, Discrimination, and Opportunism* (Gaithersburg: Associated Faculty Press, 1972) for detailed examinations of Reconstruction in Indian Territory.

[8] Duane Champagne, "Education, Culture, and Nation-Building," *Indigenous Education and Empowerment: International Perspectives*, eds. Ismael Abu-Saad and Duane Champagne (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2006), 151. Champagne offers this description of in the contemporary sense, but I maintain that it can also be applied to the Creek Nation and other Five Tribes during the nineteenth century as they worked to build national institutions and protect their cultural and political identities as members of sovereign indigenous nations. Julie Reed makes a similar case in her work on the Cherokee by arguing, "The assumption of orphan care by the nation coincided with the development of political and social institutions in the years after Cherokee removal from the Southeast." Julie Reed, "Family and Nation: Cherokee Orphan Care, 1835-1903," *American Indian Quarterly* 34 (Summer 2010): 312.

[9] This chapter builds on Champagne's assertion that "Education is one critical aspect of the nation building process that introduces skills and knowledge that are useful for the construction and continuity of Native institutions. Ideally, Western education forms, skills, and knowledge will be combined with Native forms of education, skills, and knowledge in order to find culturally unique solutions to contemporary and future social, economic, and cultural conditions." Champagne, *Indigenous Education and Empowerment,* 151.

when faced with escalating threats of territorialization from the U.S., these diverse groups, including the freedmen, united to flaunt their school system, literacy, and national progress as a defensive mechanism. Thus, education played a central role in the internal process of Creek nation-building, as well as in national strategies to thwart external threats from the U.S.

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In the immediate aftermath of the war, political reconciliation and physical recovery took priority over rebuilding schools. Leaders undertook the delicate process of reunification in the wake of political violence. Samuel Checote served as chief of the Southern party, while Sands maintained leadership among the Loyal Creeks. These parties had conflicting visions of how to organize the government and incorporate the newly emancipated Creek freedmen into the nation. The Sands party accepted the adoption of freedmen, hoped to maintain the remnants of traditional Creek political organization, and wished to decrease the coercive power of elites who led the Southern party. Meanwhile, the Southern party sought to implement a centralized system of government and social reform that would advance the nation to a status on equal terms with the United States.[10] Though the Southern party and the Loyal Creeks disagreed on fundamental political issues, they found common ground in their desire to re-open the nation's schools and provide educational opportunities for children.[11]

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[10] See David A. Chang, *Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma*, 1832-1929 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 39-70; Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 77-114; Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 166-197 for detailed histories of Creek politics following the Civil War.

[11] At the time, U.S. officials, including the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, characterized the two opposing Creek factions in binary terms and conflated political beliefs with cultural orientations. While praising Checote for leading the new constitutional government "adopted by people who favor education and progress," Ely Parker described the Sands party as revolutionaries "opposed to schools and civilization." The commissioner's impulse to define the politically conservative party as opposed to

In 1866, the Sands party requested that the Presbyterian missionaries William and Ann Eliza Robertson and James Ross Ramsay return to the nation. The Loyal Creeks held a council and invited the newly returned missionaries. The politically conservative leaders gave the educators "encouragement that the Mission school would soon be reopened." Soon after, in February of 1867, "there was an appointment made for the two parties of the Creek Nation to meet together at Deep Fork and make peace and to co-operate together as one Nation." Members of both parties invited Ramsay and Robertson to attend the council.[12] The missionaries' return indicates that, despite the tenuous political state, both parties envisioned schools as a critical part of the rebuilding process. While the reconfigured parties disputed nearly every other issue, education served as a bipartisan endeavor.

William Robertson tried to remain neutral in Creek politics as he worked to re-forge connections with men in both parties, but he encouraged a reformed system of government for the Creek Nation's protection and future progress.[13] Many educated Creeks, several of them Robertson's former students, agreed with his assessment. They vocally advocated political and social reform in the aftermath of the war. Members of the Southern party, in particular, asserted that the factionalism and the cessions of the Reconstruction treaty underscored dysfunction in the government and the need for a new code of laws. Though the Creek Council increasingly centralized under a loose code of laws prior to the Civil War, town autonomy and distinctions between Upper and

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education and "civilization" distorts the fact that many members of the party supported national schools. Parker, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, to J.D. Cox, Secretary of the Interior, *ARCIA*, 1869, 479.

[12] "James Ross Ramsay Autobiography," James Ross Ramsay Collection, Seminole Nation Papers, Native American Manuscripts, WHC, 69-70.

[13] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 179.

Lower town districts had persisted.[14] In reaction to the political fracturing during the war, "many intelligent and energetic men" who were "strongly urging reform" pushed for a new constitution. They hoped to create a more stable and cohesive nation that could defend itself from U.S. policies.[15] Despite much contention, the Creek Council that met in 1867 passed a new constitution that created executive, legislative, and judicial branches under a national government.[16]

Although the council members borrowed aspects of the American and Cherokee constitutions, including three branches of a centralized government, this new constitution preserved a distinctly Creek political system. The towns that had always served as the most important aspect of Creek social and political organization remained a central aspect of this new government. Each town elected representatives to serve in the House of Kings and the House of Warriors, but no longer divided into separate Upper and Lower Creek Councils. Although many Southern Creeks contested freedmen citizenship, three "Black towns" – Canadian Colored, North Fork Colored, and Arkansas Colored – were created and members gained representation in the council. Despite their new citizenship status, freedmen retained a distinct identity as members of the "colored" towns. The nation's citizens, who consisted of all male Creeks and the newly adopted freedmen over the age of eighteen, then elected the principal chief by popular vote.[17]

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[14] Ohland Morton, "The Government of the Creek Indians," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 8 (March 1930): 45-49.

[15] Report of J.W. Dunn, U.S. Agent to the Creek. U.S. Department of Interior, *ARCIA*, 1867, 319.

[16] Morton, "The Government of the Creek Indians," 50-53.

[17] Muscogee (Creek) Nation, *Constitution and Laws of the Muskogee Nation* (St. Louis: Levinson & Blyth, Stations Co., Printers, 1880); Chang, *The Color of Land*, 65-66.

In addition to the new centralized apparatus, the new constitution established a key political institution under the control of the national government: a public school system. The governing document solidified and expanded the pre-Civil War schools, set up six-day school districts, and included provisions for secondary schools. The new system fell under national, bureaucratic management and a single elected Superintendent of Public Instruction held responsibility for oversight. This differed from the previous configuration in which each district had their own Superintendent of Education. The new official examined and selected teachers, established new schools, and reported to the council on their progress. The superintendent also appointed boarding school superintendents, as well as three trustees in each community to manage the teachers and pupils' performance on the local level.[18]

The constitution made clear provisions for the council to reopen the schools and provide expanded educational opportunities. Leaders integrated the Tullahassee and Asbury mission schools into the new national school system and allocated $6,000 in funds for their repair and renovation in addition to their regular annuities. Although Creek officials encouraged students to pursue secondary schooling, primary education was the cornerstone of the new system. Any neighborhood could apply for a day school as long as they could sustain fifteen students and provide a facility. The Board of

[18] Muscogee (Creek) Nation, *Constitution and Laws of the Muskogee Nation*, 16-17. Literacy, both English and Muskogee, also played an important role in the new constitutional government. With the increased number of officials under the expanded and bureaucratized system, Creek leaders wished to ensure that all civil servants understood the new code of laws. The council had a portion of the laws printed in both English and Muskogee and distributed them widely. This codification and dissemination marked a clear departure from the old political system. In addition to the written constitution and code of laws, official government records were also written. Although more Creek officials than ever before had been to school, many civil servants remained illiterate in both English and their native tongue. Subsequently, they employed literate clerks, many of them former attendees of the Creek schools, to keep records. J.W. Dunn, Creek Agent, to Hon. H.L. Robinson, October 12, 1868, *ARCIA*, 743-745; Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 185.

Education would then hire a teacher, provide funding, and regulate the institution. Education officials offered training for teachers, recruited educated Creek teachers as well as experienced educators from surrounding states, and appropriated increasing amounts of funding.[19]

This new system differed from the fledgling Creek school system established before the war. Creek political officials rather than white missionaries or federal officials now managed the schools. Furthermore, the new system centralized education under a national government. This differed from the previous system in which two distinct Upper and Lower Creek school districts operated with a high degree of autonomy. Finally, the constitution provided a clear mechanism by which individual towns could petition their government to open neighborhood schools. Thus, the national school system became an important political apparatus for Creek nation-building efforts, in both the control and management of the system. It also facilitated interaction between Creek citizens and the national government and reinforced Creek national identity in the process.

Educated men largely championed the efforts to make schools a political institution as they assumed new leadership in the nation. The Civil War triggered a shift in leadership during Reconstruction. Many graduates of the mission schools, who had been privy to the most advanced level of schooling available before the war, stepped into positions created by the newly organized and bureaucratized government. As the superintendent of the Asbury Manual Labor School observed in 1866, "Of its former students many are now taking the lead among their people, industrious,

[19] Muscogee (Creek) Nation, *Constitution and Laws of the Muskogee Nation*, 40-46.

trustworthy, and capable of filling important places in the councils of the nation." [20] Similarly, the superintendent of the Tullahassee school noted that, "Our former scholars have given us great aid in our work as interpreters, trustees of our school, etc., and we bless God both for this and for the help they give their nation as members of council, judges, etc."[21] The transition to a new generation of English-educated leaders marked a noticeable shift in the power dynamics of the Creek Nation.

Historians have struggled to determine what shaped Creek leadership and party difference during the nineteenth century. Cultural orientation, political ideology, generational change, and even blood quantum have served as explanations in past interpretations. Nevertheless, any singular explanation often falls apart in the wake of close scrutiny.[22] Education, however, must be taken into consideration. During the second half of the century, Creek leaders became increasingly well educated, and if illiterate themselves, many still advocated in favor of Creek schools. In particular, a new generation of leaders, who championed an ideology of progressive nationalism, envisioned a Creek Nation in which education and national progress were inseparable. According to Mary Jane Warde, this ideology was "a nationalistic defensive measure to strengthen and assure the survival of the Creek Nation against an aggressive, often hostile, Anglo-America."[23] For many, their own experiences in Creek schools and subsequent ascension to positions of leadership fostered their sense of nationalism.

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[20] Annual Report of Thomas B. Rubble, Superintendent of Asbury Manual Labor School. U.S. Department of Interior, *ARCIA*, 1866, 329-330.

[21] William S.W. Robertson, "Our former scholars have given us great aid," series 1, box 3, folder 5, AMRC.

[22] For varying interpretations see Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance;* Claudio Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian: Race and the Unmaking of an American Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Mary Jane Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1999).

[23] Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation*, 86.

Samuel Checote, for instance, perceived a multitude of benefits that education offered his people based on his own personal experiences. He did not lose his Creek identity because of his Christian conversion or mission schooling. Rather, his education proved advantageous in his rise to leadership. A Methodist minister who attended Asbury Mission before removal, Checote served as lieutenant colonel in the Confederate Army and then rose to power among Southern Creeks. In the first election under the 1867 Constitution, citizens elected Checote as principal chief. Checote was an ardent nationalist who continuously sought to ensure the survival of his people.[24] For him, the future of Creeks depended on building a stable, modern, and progressive nation. He argued that in order for the Creek Nation to protect itself against further colonial policies, the people needed to be educated in the very language, laws, and politics that threatened them. Throughout his term as principal chief, he emphasized the importance of education in this regard: "An encouraging feature in our onward progress is the firm hold education has taken upon the minds of all classes of our people." He further believed "educational purposes productive of the greatest good" for the Creek Nation.[25] Thus, he lent "every encouragement to the various national schools" and frequently employed the Creeks' educational progress in his political discourse.[26]

Like reformers and politicians in the United States, Checote understood education, specifically public schooling, as a pillar of republicanism. Unlike his Euro-American contemporaries, however, his brand of education reform stemmed from an

[24] C.A. Lambert, "Biographical sketch of Samuel Checote," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 4 (September, 1926): 275-280.

[25] "Message of Samuel Checote to the Honorable Houses of Kings Warriors," October 5, 1875, box 1, folder 5, Samuel Checote Collection, WHC.

[26] L.N. Robinson, Supt. of Indian Affairs to Ely Park, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 1, 1869, *ARCIA*, 1869, 840.

ideology of indigenous nationalism and his ongoing efforts to build a Creek republican state. Checote believed that Creek republicanism could only be successful if it developed internally instead of being imposed by the exploitative federal government. He expressed to the Creek people that "the onward advancement of our government towards a more perfect system will be the legitimate outgrowth of experience and not the fitful dreams of theorists who experiment upon the passions and feelings of imaginary wants of a simple people." Creek national schools served as a critical component of this ongoing "experience" that would allow Creek citizens to progress towards a perfect state. Checote's rhetoric should not be confused with Euro-American assimilationist ideology that asserted Native Americans needed to abandon cultural and political identities as indigenous peoples. Instead, he believed that Creeks' embrace of "civilization," their national school system, and their recent political reforms wholly demonstrated "'their capacity for perfect self-government.'"[27]

Checote was not alone in his belief. Many other early attendees of the Creek mission schools rose to authoritative positions and espoused a progressive national ideology that placed a high importance on education. Pleasant Porter, for instance, played a critical role in reconstructing the Creek Nation following the Civil War, including the expansion of the national school system. A member of the extended Perryman family, Porter was a Creek of mixed Indian, white, and African descent who was raised on his family's plantation near Clarkesville. Despite some degree of African descent, Porter's class status and kinship connections allowed him to identify as an elite Creek. For instance, even with attempts to prohibit Afro-Creeks from the manual labor

[27] "Checote's 1875 concession speech," quoted in John Bartlett Meserve, "Chief Samuel Checote, With Sketches of Chiefs Locher Harjo and Ward Coachman," *Chronicles of Oklahoma 16* (December 1938): 404

schools during the antebellum period, he continued to attend Tullahassee during in the 1850s where he excelled as a scholar and forged close bonds with the Robertson family. He served in the Confederate army during the war and then returned to care for his family farm, as well as his widowed mother, brother, and sisters.[28] An intellectual who enjoyed having time to himself to read and write, Porter was not content to remain a farmer. Restless, he wrote, "My greatest desire is to be a man of general information so that I may be useful. I fear I am not doing my duty as well as I should."[29] He soon found many opportunities to do his "duty" and be of service to his nation.

Porter applied his skills and education to Creek national causes in several public-service positions. The council elected him inaugural Superintendent of Schools in 1867.[30] In this capacity, he worked to reopen the day schools and reorganize them under the new constitutionally based system. He found that as Creek citizens in all parts of the nation began "taking a lively interest in school matters" and seemed "be aware of the fact that to educate will be their only Security & Salvation &c."[31] Outside his public role, he continued his own education by reading law, "the most interesting of literature" he had ever tried.[32] As he wrote his former teacher, "My nation calls for my service…"[33] Porter explained, "I hope at no far distant day to be qualified to defend the

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[28] Porter belonged to the Bird Clan. His mother was Phoebe, the daughter Lydia Perryman and Tah-lo-pee Tust-a-nuk-kee, a town chief, and his father was a white man named Edward Porter, whose family had been connected with the Creeks since before removal. Porter's Creek name was Talof Harjo. Porter was raised on his family's plantation near Clarksville. John Bartlett Meserve, "Chief Pleasant Porter," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 26 (Autumn 1931): 318-334; "Newspaper Notice on the Death of Porter, 1907," box 5, no. 334, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

[29] Pleasant Porter to Mrs. A.E. Robertson, May 22, n.d. series 2, box 9, folder 6, AMRC.

[30] Meserve, "Chief Pleasant Porter," 323.

[31] S.W.Perryman quoting Pleasant Porter to William Schenk Robertson, May 4, 1868, series 2, box 18, folder 6, AMRC.

[32] Pleasant Porter to Anne Eliza Worcester Robertson, January 19, 1870, series 2, box 13, folder 4, AMRC.

[33] Pleasant Porter to Anne Eliza Worcester Robertson, May 15, 1871, series 2, box 13, folder 4, AMRC.

rights of my nation under any circumstances. My motto and aim in life is that my nation shall never be the worse for my living." Specifically, Porter feared "the rapid development of plans maturing for our destruction."[34] During the three decades that followed, Porter devoted his career to public service, serving twelve years as a representative in the Creek Council, a national delegate on several occasions, and principal chief.[35] Throughout his career, he wished to recast Creek country as a prosperous, progressive, indigenous nation led by educated statesmen. Better educated and more affluent than many white contemporaries, Porter poured his energy into defending and "upbuilding" his nation, while advancing Creek nationalism and looking toward the future.[36]

Joseph M. Perryman, another educated Creek, also assumed a leadership position during Reconstruction and in turn, worked to implement schools as tools of nation-building. Perryman was a member of an extensive and powerful family. He first attended Coweta and then moved to Tullahassee in 1853 at the age of twenty to study for the Presbyterian ministry. During the Civil War, he served in the 1st Creek Regiment of Mounted Volunteers in the Confederate Army.[37] As the war ended, he petitioned the former Presbyterian missionaries to the Creek Nation, including the Robertsons, James Ross Ramsay, and Robert Loughridge, to return and help re-establish the missions and schools.[38] Perryman then organized the North Fork Presbyterian Church. As an educated Creek man from an influential family, however, he wished to

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[34] Pleasant Porter to Anne Eliza Worcester Robertson, January 19, 1870, series 2, box 13, folder 4, AMRC.

[35] Meserve, "Chief Pleasant Porter," 318-334.

[36] "Obituary on Porter, October 17, 1907," box 5, no. 341, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

[37] John Bartlett Meserve, "The Perrymans," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 15 (Summer 1937): 168-171.

[38] Walter Lowrie to William Schenk Robertson, April 11, 1864, series 2, box 18, folder 4, AMRC.

serve both God and his nation. From 1868 to 1874, he sat in the House of Kings and then served as the national treasurer before assuming the position of Superintendent of Public Instruction after Porter.[39] In this capacity, he reported that even in neighborhoods where schools had previously failed, now Creek parents seemed "fully confident that success will attend the efforts made to advance the rising generation in civilization and education." Like Perryman, Porter, and other educated leaders, everyday citizens began to invest faith, time, and money in education, in hopes that it would prove "a credit to the nation and a lasting benefit to the people."[40] By 1871, the council supported twenty-eight neighborhood schools throughout the nation with over 700 students in attendance.[41]

Perryman worked to expand educational opportunities because he sought to place Creek children on equal footing with their Euro-American peers. He recognized the "importance of having the Indian children qualified to cope with the white, with whom they are someday to be associated in the privilege and responsibility of civilized life."[42] With the permission of the Creek Council in 1871, Perryman entered into a contract with the Southern Presbyterian Church to open the Muskogee Institute, a boarding school in Prairie Grove that accommodated forty female students.[43] Perryman insisted that his students' "progress in learning and attention to studies will compare favorably to any similar schools among the whites."[44] As Superintendent of Public Instruction and as Superintendent of the Muskogee Institute, Perryman's goal was to

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[39] Meserve, "The Perrymans," 168-171.
[40] Report of J. Perryman, Supt. of Public Instruction, August 24, 1870, *ARCIA*, 1870, 763-764.
[41] Report of J.M. Perryman, Supt. of Public Instruction, October 12, 1871, *ARCIA*, 1871, 995.
[42] Report of J. Perryman, Supt. of Public Instruction, August 24, 1870, *ARCIA*, 1870, 764.
[43] Muskogee Institute closed in 1877 when the Southern Presbyterians withdrew their support. John Haynes, Chairman of the Committee on Education, "Resolution Submitted the National Council, Creek Nation Records microcopy (hereafter cited as CNR), roll 43, slide 36096.
[44] "Report of J.M. Perryman, Principal of Muskogee Institute, n.d." CNR, roll 43, Slide 36098.

provide Creek children with the skills and knowledge necessary to defend their nation. In the years that followed, his political career blossomed and he continued to view schools as an apparatus for the "rapid advancement" of the Creek nation and as "conducive to the upbuilding of our race."[45] He routinely stated that the welfare and progress of his nation lay in the education of its citizens.

The ascension of Porter, Perryman, and numerous other boarding school graduates in Creek political life was not coincidental, nor did it simply stem from these men's desire to serve their nation. Instead, their schooling marked a reciprocal exchange between themselves and their government. The older generation of leaders, as well as their peers who had not received the same opportunities, expected educated young men to use their knowledge of Euro-American language, politics, law, and economy to help rebuild the nation after the Civil War. George Washington Grayson recalled that because the council had provided him with schooling at Asbury and awarded him a scholarship to attend Arkansas College, "the chiefs and headmen of the nation seemed to feel as if they had some right to my services, especially as a clerk of the chiefs or the national council." Grayson recalled, "Pleasant Porter and J.M. Perryman were also quite often called to act in the same work."[46] The nation had invested in them as young men and now its leaders expected them to reinvest in the nation.

Of course, these young men also used the education to their own personal advantage. Grayson, for instance, remembered, "My credit wherever I was known was good, and I was able soon to aid materially toward providing a livelihood for Mother

[45] "3rd Annual Statement, October 5, 1883," Folder 3, Joseph M. Perryman Collection, WHC.

[46]George W. Grayson, *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy: The Autobiography of Chief G.W. Grayson*, ed. W. David Baird (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1988), 126.

and the children."[47] In the decades after the Civil War, many other educated Creeks became wealthy ranchers and merchants. Although with emancipation, the former planter class ceased to exist, education emerged as a more pronounced marker of political power, economic advantage, and social prestige.

In fact, these leaders worked internally to ensure that people like themselves – educated men at the top of the socio-economic hierarchy - could maintain control over Creek society. For instance, Wash Grayson recalled that the Loyal Creeks and the freedmen considered themselves "the victors in the war" and believed that they "should in the administration of government exercise superior privileges" to those who had supported the Confederacy. Grayson asserted that despite this sentiment, "The intelligence and the little wealth that remained, however, was in the Southern Creeks, and this intelligence could not brook the idea of being dominated and governed by the ignorance of the northern Indians supplemented by their late negro slaves."[48] Grayson understood that the cards had been stacked in favor of his political allies and that it came at the expense of other Creeks. As Claudio Saunt argues, Grayson and his peers' "elitism built on racial and economic hierarchy alienated poor, uneducated Creeks and disenfranchised those with African ancestry."[49]

While these men implemented their own methods of nation-building, their approach exacerbated political, social, and economic fissures rather than fostering national unity. Checote, Porter, Perryman, and Grayson represent only one faction during Reconstruction. Others sought to expand their own opportunities and implement their own visions of Creek nationhood during this period. Creek nation-building was

[47] Grayson, *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy* 126.
[48] Grayson, *A Creek Warrior for the Confederacy*, 124.
[49] Saunt, *Black, White, and Indian*, 127.

ongoing and contested process. As part of this process, the efforts to make education a national institution sparked ongoing political debates over who had control and access to schools. Thus, education often served as a divisive issue but not because it was embraced by some and rejected by others. Rather, different sectors of Creek society struggled to obtain their fair share in the new school system and ensure that it took a form that they deemed most advantageous.

For instance, education was a chief concern for communities of former slaves looking to capitalize on their new emancipated status, but education for freedmen quickly became a point of contention in Creek politics. Freedom provided former slaves with the right to vote, control their own labor, use land, and attend school. Prior to emancipation, "[l]ots of the slave owners didn't want their slaves to learn reading and writing."[50] Thus, the potential for educational freedom marked a considerable turning point in the lives of individuals who no longer had to settle for forced ignorance.

Former Creek slaves attempting to negotiate their new status found themselves in a precarious socio-political situation. The 1866 Reconstruction Treaty guaranteed that freedmen "shall have and enjoy all the rights and privileges of native citizens, including an equal interest in the soil and national fund." The agreement granted freedmen rights to vote and participate in politics, public land use, per capita payments, equal protection under law, and access to schools paid for by the national fund.[51] While it is true that Creek freedmen enjoyed more political inclusion and social freedoms than freedmen in Southern states, the Checote administration worked to limit them. Historian David

[50] "Phoebe Banks" in T. Lindsay Baker and Julie Philips Baker, *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 31.

[51] "Treaty with the Creeks, 1866," *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Vol. II*, ed. by Charles Joseph Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 932.

Chang defines Checote's efforts as a "project of national consolidation" that sought to reinforce "racial hierarchy in its effort to defend Creek sovereignty after defeat in the Civil War."[52] For instance, after the Creek agent J.W. Dunn compiled a list of 1,774 freedmen eligible for citizenship, Checote saw to it that they were "refused any share in the moneys…for that reason that said person were of African descent." Only after a delegation of African Creeks travelled to Washington D.C. in 1869 did Congress allocated $30,882.54 in tribal annuities for the freedmen.[53] While progressive Creek nationalists sought to dominate former slaves, freedmen actively worked to take advantage of their new social, political, and economic opportunities. Many freedmen viewed schools as the key to social mobility, political agency, and economic prosperity in the post-war Creek Nation.

Immediately after the war, freedmen in Indian Territory, like freedmen in the Southern states, depended on the Freedman's Bureau, benevolent societies, and educated community allies for schooling. The Freedmen's Bureau, however, only operated in Indian Territory for a few months in 1865 and withdrew from the region after the Five Tribes signed the Reconstruction treaties. In the Southern states, the Freedmen's Bureau continued to facilitate schooling for former slaves. Meanwhile, elite whites attempted to curtail educational "self-help" among African Americans through legislative action. They "stressed low taxation, opposed compulsory school attendance laws, blocked the passage of new laws that would strengthen the constitutional basis of public education, and generally discouraged the expansion of the

[52] David A. Chang, ""An Equal Interest in the Soil": Creek Small-Scale Farming and the Work of Nationhood, 1866-1889," *American Indian Quarterly* 33, (Winter, 2009): 99.

[53] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 178.

public school system."[54] White Southerners also used extralegal tactics of violence, intimidation, and terror to minimize educational opportunities for the free black population. Unlike their Southern counterparts, Creek freedmen's education officially became the responsibility of the Creek national government, in which they had gained representation.

The realities of educational opportunities for freedmen in Indian Territory largely depended on the reactions of the specific Indian Nations in which they resided. Leaders of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations worked to subjugate their former slaves and refused to adopt them. Although Choctaws and Chickasaws rebuilt the impressive systems of public schools established before the war, they prohibited freedmen from attending them. The Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations also refused to allocate any of their national funds to be used for freedmen's education. The Choctaw Council did allow the Bureau of Indian Affairs to support two missionary schools for the freedmen but lent no direct support to these establishments.[55] Conversely, the much smaller Seminole Nation, where many citizens had a high degree of mixed Native American and African American ancestry, incorporated the comparatively smaller number of ex-slaves into their nation as citizens. The Cherokee Nation allocated a portion of their education fund towards freedmen schools. By 1876, it operated six schools for "the children of colored citizens" out of its seventy-one total day schools.[56] Creek freedmen, like Cherokee freedmen, enjoyed far more educational advantages than those in the

[54] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 23.

[55] Edw. O. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, November 1, 1875, *ARCIA*, 1875, 557.

[56] "Annual Report of S.W. Marston, U.S. Indian Agent for the Union Agency, Muscogee, Indian Territory, August 31, 1876," *ARCIA*, 1876, 465.

Choctaw and Chickasaw nations where the belief in black inferiority and the forced adoption of freedmen provoked a stronger backlash.[57]

While legally freedmen had full and equal rights of citizenship, many Creeks worked to limit their agency. Elite members pursued what David Chang has described as an effort "to consolidate wealth and power and impose a form of racial nationalism on the Creek Nation."[58] Education became one arena in which elite Creeks worked to draw the boundaries around their political status and national identity. Thus, they attempted to create clear-cut lines between the schools for Creek children and the schools for "colored" children. Efforts to construct demarcated categories of race and citizenship, however, rarely worked in reality. Instead, racial lines remained permeable since such a high degree of mixed ancestry existed among Creek citizens.

The Creek Council incorporated freedmen schools into its new, national public school system and provided funding for them out of the national fund, but did so gradually, reflecting the tenuous position of former slaves. Moreover, the council distinguished the schools from those for children of families who obtained citizenship through kinship. In 1870, twenty-four new national schools operated in the Creek Nation, all of which denied access to freedmen. By 1874, however, political pressure from the newly adopted citizens resulted in five segregated "colored" schools. Although freedmen remained "debarred from all benefit of the boarding schools," designated "colored" neighborhood schools in communities including Black Jack,

[57] Carol Sue Humphrey, "Freedmen Schools," Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, www.okhistory.org (accessed November 21, 2015).

[58] Chang, *The Color of Land*, 12.

Canaan, and the old Creek agency received national education funding.[59] The new block of freedmen representatives in the national government ensured others heard their demands for schools and contributed to this gradual expansion of educational opportunities.

Nevertheless, even those schools under the control of the Creek Council depended largely upon community efforts for success. Neighborhoods were responsible for providing facilities, while local trustees assumed direct oversight for the quality of education. For the most part, Creek missionaries and Afro-Creek community leaders helped establish these schools in the immediate post-war years and then the Creek Council funded a portion of them. For instance, Mary Grayson, a Creek freedwoman and former slave of Mose Perryman who had been a small child during the war, attended the Blackjack schools after the war. She recalled "it was kind of a mission school and not one of the Creek nation schools" and that she had a Cherokee and two white teachers during her time there. The Blackjack school then became a "free school" under the administration of the Creek government.[60]

Other freedmen communities opened grassroots schools. For instance, at the Afro-Creek Baptist stronghold, the Old Fountain Mission, community members opened a small school. Ketch Barnett, a leading Creek freedman led the Old Fountain Church, and helped establish the log school that his grandson, Alfred Barnett, soon attended. Phillip A. Lewis, who was born in 1870 to two former Creek slaves, also attended the

[59] "Report of J. Perryman, Supt. of Public Instruction," August 24, 1870, *ARCIA*, 1870, 763; "Report of F.H. Smith to E.P. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *ARCIA*, 1874, 379; Annual Report of S.W. Marston, U.S. Indian Agent for the Union Agency, Muscogee, Indian Territory, August 31, 1876," *ARCIA*, 1876, 466.

[60] "Mary Grayson," in T. Lindsay Baker and Julie Philips Baker, *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 171-178.

old Fountain school in the 1870s. After the death of his father when he was an infant, Lewis' grandmother, who "made a home for every orphan or destitute child in the country" sent him "along with the other children was caring for" to the Old Fountain school.[61] For those who could afford it, subscription schools offered another alternative. Alex Blackston, the son of two freedmen, attended a small subscription school in Prairie Grove.[62] Another subscription school opened in a neighborhood near the Old Agency called the Gum Spring School. Students paid one dollar a month to attend.[63] Nevertheless, not all communities had sufficient resources to sustain schools. Other freedmen simply lived too far from any of their designated schools to attend. Labor demands at home also prevented regular attendance from students whose families needed them to work to remain self-sufficient.[64]

While the Creek Nation certainly provided more schooling opportunities for freedmen than Southern states, former Creek slaves still struggled to gain equal access to education during the 1870s. As freedmen built new community institutions, newly elected representatives in the three "colored" towns in the national council worked to seize the new opportunities for political inclusion. Despite their efforts, the racial hierarchy that had emerged in the decades prior to the Civil War did not dissolve overnight. Whereas Asbury and Tullahassee offered Creek Indians secondary education, the national government offered nothing beyond primary schooling for freedmen children. This only reinforced class divisions. Highly educated Creeks who attended the mission schools used their education to move into prominent political

[61] Interview with Philip A. Lewis, ID: 0000, Vol. 53, Indian-Pioneer Papers, WHC.
[62] Interview with Alex Blackston, ID: 7826, Vol. 8, Indian-Pioneer Papers, WHC.
[63] Interview with Sam Todd, ID: 0000, Vol. 91, Indian-Pioneer Papers, WHC.
[64] For more on African Creeks' efforts to incorporate education into their communities during Reconstruction see Zellar, *African Creeks*, 94-95.

positions and lucrative business roles, while the majority of freedmen turned to subsistence farming to make a living. Further discrepancies became apparent in the funding for the neighborhood schools.[65]

During the late 1860s and early 1870s, the separate "colored" schools did not receive their fair share of the nation's education fund. After freedmen representatives in the national council criticized the incongruities, the council promised to allocate $3,000 towards a mission school in 1876. Even after that, however, Creek freedmen still did not receive their entitled portion. Out of the approximately $27,000 that the Creek Council allocated toward education each year, the freedmen schools received approximately $3,300 per year. A group of representatives in the council maintained they were entitled to $4,400, which they argued, "had been used in the education of the Indians only." Since the number of Afro-Creeks equaled approximately 18% of Creek citizens by this time, they should have received a proportionate amount of the school fund. Nevertheless, the council instead allocated these funds towards schools for children without African heritage.[66]

The continued efforts of some Creeks to limit Afro-Creeks' citizenship rights marked a clear carry over of the race and class hierarchy prior to the Civil War. Those privileged by slavery sought to preserve that status during Reconstruction and incorporated these efforts into their understanding of Creek nationhood. Race and

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[65] Gary Zellar argues, "The Creeks were truly in advance of any states, North or South, in extending legal equality to people of African descent." Zellar, *African Creeks*, 91. Both David Chang and Claudio Saunt, however, qualify this argument by demonstrating that elite Creeks worked to reinforce a racial and class hierarchy in the Creek Nation following the Civil War. See Saunt, *Black,White, and Indian,* 111-131; David Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 39-70.

[66] "Statement of Monday Durant, Simon Brown, Ned Robin, Perro Bruner, Thos. Bruner, Henry Reed, and Benjamin Barnett to the House of Kings and House of Warriors," CRN roll 49, slide 38465; *Senate Committee on the Territories Investigation into Sentiments in the Indian Territory Regarding Establishment of a Territorial Government, etc.,* 45th Congress, 1879, Senate Report 744, Serial Set Id: 1839, 112.

privilege certainly factored into leaders' debates over the rights of citizens, especially after the adoption of the freedmen. Moreover, the discourse concerning the role of African Americans and Native peoples in the American nation-state influenced Creeks' ideas about who did or did not belong in their own nation. In an era of federally dictated Reconstruction, some sought to distinguish themselves from subjugated African Americans, particularly as it became clear that emancipation would not usher in racial equality in the United States. Creeks consistent distinction between "Indian" citizens and the "colored" citizens in national matters reflects this trend.[67] Nevertheless, Afro-Creeks worked to claim their own place in the Creek Nation.

Freedmen continuously negotiated their right to participate in institutions, including the national schools. Laura Newcomb, a young white woman and experienced teacher from Kansas, witnessed this firsthand. After Pleasant Porter recruited her to teach, she passed the Creek teacher examination and received a contract to lead the Okmulgee day school.[68] Her class consisted of thirty-five pupils but nearly every day a small freedman boy joined the students. She often permitted him to stay despite the fact that Creek law excluded him from attending this school. When word of Newcomb's leniency reached the ears of the Superintendent of Schools, William McComb, he began to visit her school regularly. Upon finding the boy in attendance,

[67] Fay Yarbrough similarly argues that "Cherokees saw themselves as racially different from blacks and wanted to preserve that difference and distance between the two groups by preventing intermarriage between them." This too, was linked to ideas about race and Cherokee understandings of national sovereignty. Fay A. Yarbrough, *Race and the Cherokee Nation: Sovereignty in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 75.

[68] Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Mrs. Laura E. Harsha," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* Vol. 18: (June, 1940): 182-184.

the superintendent sent him home and reprimanded the teacher, noting that a "colored" boy could "not attend school with the Indian children."[69]

The superintendent's rejection did not deter the young boy from pursuing an education. Newcomb recalled, "The little fellow was persistent and would return each time." Finally, the teacher intervened on his behalf and told McComb that she needed him to remain in the school as her interpreter because she did not understand the Creek language.[70] The boy's ability to serve as a cultural go-between for his teacher and fellow students provided him with enough social capital that he was able to challenge attempts to segregate him from other Creek children.[71] As the youth demonstrated, freedmen actively pursued schooling even as elite Creeks tried to marginalize them within the education system.

Afro-Creeks found powerful political allies in their effort to curtail the elitist nation-building attempts of progressive Creek nationalists and participate equally in institutions. They forged a political alliance with many Creeks belonging to the conservative party. Whereas race in the U.S. South continued to create divisions among lower class African American and white farmers, class fostered cross-racial political alliances in the Creek Nation. During Reconstruction, Loyal Creeks who considered themselves the victors of the war and the victims of the Reconstruction Treaty remained understandably bitter against the Southern party. Many also continued to practice small-scale farming while more affluent Southern Creeks turned to large-scale ranching

[69] "Experiences of a Pioneer Woman: Interview with Laura E. Harsha," ID: 0000, Vol. 40, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.

[70] "Experiences of a Pioneer Woman: Interview with Laura E. Harsha," ID: 0000, Vol. 40, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.

[71] Gary Zellar discusses how serving as interpreters allowed Afro-Creeks to act as cultural go-betweens in several aspects of Creek life at length in *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation.*

in the absence of slave labor. Loyal Creeks pushed back against the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of politically and economically elite Creeks. Though Loyal Creeks agreed on the need for schools, during the late 1860s and early 1870s, they contested the new constitutional government and the elitist nation-building project. Based on their "common interest in the soil" and opposition to the Checote administration, they built a political coalition with Afro-Creeks. This political block proved powerful in the 1875 election. The Loyal Creek candidates for principal chief and second chief, Lochar Harjo and Ward Coachman respectively, received unanimous votes from the three African Creek towns.[72]

While interest in ensuring equal opportunities for land use created political cohesion between freedmen and political conservatives, they also shared a broad desire to share equitably in emerging national institutions. Both politically conservative Creeks and freedmen resented the advantageous educational opportunities enjoyed by elite Creeks and the social inequalities that they reinforced. Consequently, universal education became the subject of much debate across lines of class, race, and political orientation. Historian James D. Anderson argues that in southern states, freedmen's education "forced all classes to confront the question of universal education" but ultimately the "result was a postwar South that was extremely hostile to the idea of universal public education."[73] So too in the Creek Nation the power embedded in intratribal relations of class, race, and gender fostered a dialogue on educational rights. This ongoing conversation, however, resulted in a situation that ran counter to southern

[72] Chang, *The Color of Land*, 55-70; Zellar, *African Creeks*, 109-114; Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 189-197.

[73] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, 4.

states. Rather than growing increasingly hostile towards the idea of equal access to education, the majority of Creek citizens embraced the idea of universal public schools.

While Afro-Creeks used their political agency in the council to lobby for increased educational opportunities, their politically conservative Creek allies gradually accepted schools and recognized their potential benefits. Many neighborhoods in Upper Creek towns had enough children to sustain a class and petitioned the Creek Council to support a national school in their area. By 1875, towns such as Hillabee, Tuskegee, Eufala, North Fork, Nuyuka, Hlob-Hlocco, Arbeka, Killagee, and Topofka had schoolhouses.[74] While members of the Southern party in the council encouraged education generally, they did not impose education on areas with more culturally and politically conservative orientations. Instead, schools only opened in neighborhoods that had enough students and the facilities to meet the new national standards. Community members initiated their establishment.

The boarding schools for Creek children, however, remained a point of contention for politically conservative Creeks. Since so many former boarding school students belonged to the Checote party, filled powerful governmental roles, and occupied an upper class position, many politically conservative Creeks "maintained that the existing boarding schools belonged to the Checote party." Unlike freedmen, who officials excluded from the boarding schools, select Creeks from Upper towns did attend the boarding schools during the 1870s but the majority of Upper Creeks did not benefit as widely from the establishments. As a result, a general sentiment emerged among conservative Creeks that boarding schools rather than day schools offered superior education and that children in conservative towns should have increased

[74] "Teachers of the Muskokee Nation, Term of 1875-1876," CRN, roll 47, Slide 37384.

access. As a result, leaders from these towns advocated moving boarding schools further west in the Creek Nation into conservative strongholds.[75]

Beginning in 1875, the newly elected principal chief Lochar Harjo, who represented this conservative faction, worked to meet these demands. He advocated a more democratic education system to the Creek legislature.[76] The new national leader only spoke Creek, yet he believed that, like himself, those who were "full Indian" needed "educating the most." "We should by all means in our power encourage Education, the diffusions of knowledge and religion among our people," he declared.[77] In a later statement, he more directly addressed the growing economic and racial inequalities within the nation and laid out the platform of his conservative Creek and Afro-Creek supporters: "I … recommend that all citizens, irregardless of race or color, have equal school privileges within the Muskoke Nation, and that the adopted colored, have a mission school." He further suggested, "a manual labor school be established at some central point in the upper towns, for the better education of our full blooded Muskokee." Co-opting the same political rhetoric used by his political opposition, Harjo asserted "equal school privileges" would grant all citizens of the Creek Nation "the blessings of a more advanced civilization." Harjo represented the politically conservative Creeks and Afro-Creeks who desired "to advance a more liberal and impartial education."[78]

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[75] Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 220.

[76] Harjo had travelled with his parents to Indian Territory during removal and served in the Union Army during the war. He hailed from the isolated Upper Creek town of Nuyuka. Meserve, "Chief Samuel Checote, With Sketches of Chiefs Locher Harjo and Ward Coachman," 404.

[77] Message of Lochar Harjo, Principal Chief of the Creeks, to the Houses of Warriors and Kings, December 6, 1875 (typescript)," folder 1, Lochar Harjo Collection, WHC.

[78] "Indian Journal--December 7, 1876: "Message of Lochar Harjo" to the Houses of Warriors and Kings (typescript)," folder 2, Lochar Harjo Collection, WHC.

Through the remainder of the 1870s, the Creek Council, under pressure from the Loyal Creek/Afro-Creek alliance, continued to implement education reform. Although members of the Checote faction who still held control over the legislature impeached Harjo in 1876, some of the school reforms he advocated resulted in increased opportunities for Creek citizens. The council made provisions for a boarding school for freedmen and one for "full Indians" in the western part of the nation.[79] Ward Coachman, Harjo's successor, continued to promote the "Education of the youth of our nation, both Indian and Freedman; male and female."[80] Coachman, like Harjo, also understood education as a form of insurance for Creek welfare: "Education – Christianity and Knowledge are the safeguards and in connection with industry and economy, constitute the true happiness of all nations."[81] Like members of the Southern party, these conservative Creeks accepted that education now served important functions for the benefit of Creek citizens and the future of the nation. They worked to ensure that everyone received a fair stake in the education system.

These leaders included women in their efforts to guarantee "equal school privileges" for all Creeks. Nevertheless, male leaders excluded women of all classes and colors from the formal political system. Instead, the embrace of patriarchy pigeonholed Creek women into marginalized roles defined by gender. Leaders of both political parties argued that Creek woman should be educated so they would be "useful" to their sons and husbands, and by extension to their nation. For instance, Lochar

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[79] "Letter of C. Shurz to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the impeachment of Lochar Harjo, December 17, 1877," folder 4, Lochar Harjo Collection, WHC; Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 220-226.

[80] "Annual Message of Ward Coachman to the Houses of Warriors and Kings (October 1878)," folder 3, Ward Coachman Collection, WHC.

[81] Message of Ward Coachman to the Houses of Warriors and Kings of the Muskoke (sic) Nation--Annual Message to the National Council (October 1, 1877), folder 1, Ward Coachman Collection, Manuscripts, WHC.

Harjo, while promoting universal education, explained the objectives of female schools differently from those of male education. He stated, "Educate the youth of both sexes to honesty industry and economy that the men may be good useful and prosperous citizens, the women that they may take their places in the household and culinary Departments and be helpmate for man."[82] Similarly, Ward Coachman called for additional liberal appropriations to the Muskogee Institute, which exclusively served Creek women. He justified this request by arguing, "Our daughters should be by Education, instructed, refined, and exalted to that position which qualifies them, as mothers to teach our children in such a manner that our sons may become useful to their God, their country, society and themselves."[83] Thus, educated women's options were largely limited to serving as wives and mothers or as teachers in the national schools.

Similar to Victorian womanhood in the U.S., the ideology of Creek womanhood reflected a classist ideal. The majority of Creek women continued to carry out important labor roles within their family households and businesses. Those who had attended the manual labor schools could apply practical skills they learned from their education such as cooking, sewing, and weaving to contribute to family economies. Education, however, offered woman a second option to serve as teachers. During the 1870s, several Creek women who had attended Tullahassee and Asbury passed the teacher examinations and received contracts to teach in the neighborhood schools. These included Mary Herrod, Sarah Yargee, Kizzie Shaw, Mathilda Porter, Nellie Fife,

[82] "Message of Lochar Harjo, Principal Chief of the Creeks, to the Houses of Warriors and Kings, December 6, 1875 (typescript)," folder 1, Lochar Harjo Collection, WHC.

[83] Message of Ward Coachman to the Houses of Warriors and Kings of the Muskoke (sic) Nation--Annual Message to the National Council (October 1, 1877), folder 1, Ward Coachman Collection, WHC. Historian Devon Mihesuah has argued that the Cherokees adopted a similar conception of education as a tool to educate women as dutiful wives according to gendered norms that closely paralleled white Victorian womanhood. Mihesuah, *Cultivating the Rosebuds*, 3.

and Kate Ross, all of whom taught in day schools throughout the nation. For their work, they earned an impressive sum of $400 a year and widespread respect from the citizens of the nation.[84] Although they did not receive appointments in the government like their former male classmates, their education provided them with considerable economic and social advantages over most Creek women.

The political collaboration between conservatives and Afro-Creeks proved fruitful in expanding school opportunities for both male and female non-elite Creek citizens. Although they sought advancements in national politics, cross-racial alliances led to the successful implementation of these gains at the community level. The teaching career of Robert Leslie, the former Tullahassee student, demonstrates this process. Displaced by the Civil War, Leslie made his way to New Orleans where he continued his education, learning Hebrew and Greek while teaching in local schools. There, he met and married Nellie Colles, a well-educated African American schoolteacher in 1874. Upon returning to the Creek Nation with his bride shortly thereafter, Leslie, like many of his former classmates, enmeshed himself in national education issues.[85] Unlike some of his peers, however, whose growing racial consciousness worked to exclude Afro-Creeks from the national identity, Leslie, who identified as a "full blood" Creek, became an ally of the Afro-Creek community.

Like many of his classmates, Leslie's early education and war experience proved formative in his later life and career in teaching. Ever the poet, he penned

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[84] "Teachers of the Muskokee Nation, Term of 1875-1876," CRN, roll 47, slide 37384; "Life and Experiences of a Creek Indian Woman, Mrs. Mary Lewis Herrod," Indian-Pioneer Papers 1:312-316, WHC; Mathilda Porter to Alice Robertson, 1870, series 2, box 9, folder 5, AMRC.

[85] W.O. Tuggle, *Shem, Ham, and Japheth: The Papers of W.O. Tuggle Comprising His Indian Diary, Sketches, and Observations, Myths & Washington Journal in the Territory & At the Capital, 1879-1882*, ed. Eugene Current-Garcia and Dorothy B. Hatfield (Athens: University of Georgia, 1973), 104-105.

verses that summed up the wartime experiences of the generation educated at the mission schools prior to the Civil War:

> Remember O! remember I prithee
> Of the times we spent at Tallahassee,
> Both young and old absorbed in pleasure,
> Ever storing in our hearts with presious treasure.
> R.M. Loughridge then, head of the happy band,
> That made so cheerful on that little spot of land;
> Love was glowing in every heart sincere,
> Alas many has ended their happy carreer:
> Since events occur, and dispersed the happy crew,
> Let us then unite in friendship and to each be true.
> In the end, may hope to meet where happiness never end,
> Everlasting peace and joy with Jesus to contend.[86]

One of the "happy crew" dispersed by the war, Leslie returned to the Creek Nation in 1878 to once again "unite in friendship" with his former classmates, many of whom filled important political positions in the nation. Along with his African American wife, Leslie soon forged connections in the Afro-Creek community. That year, the council delivered on its promise and provided $2,056 towards a boarding school for Afro-Creeks. Leslie, a Coachman supporter, an adopted member of the African Creek Baptist Church, and a representative of the Baptist Home Missionary Society, accepted a contract with the Creek Council to serve as principal.[87]

This marked the first instance in which the national government supported secondary education for Afro-Creeks. The school opened in November 1878 at the Old Union Agency under Leslie's direction. He had agreed to teach, "all branches of an English education usually taught in the primary and high schools of the United States," as well as agriculture to the boys and "the duties of housewifery" to the girls. Thus, the

[86] "Leslie R. to Shepher, N.A. (Miss), 1869," series 2, box 5, folder 5, AMRC.
[87] "Articles of Agreement, October 30, 1878," CNR, roll 49, slide 38468.

curriculum matched that of the boarding schools. Leslie drew on his personal education to develop coursework in "reading, writing, geography, natural science, and history." During its first term, he reported that the students "progressed well" and that their health and "deportment [was] good."[88] Despite its progress, the school only operated for one term because the federal government reclaimed control over the Old Agency building and grounds where the school operated. Nevertheless, with this precedent in place, Afro-Creeks would continue to lobby for expanded educational opportunities.[89]

Even as they debated the specific nature of schools within the Creek Nation, progressive nationalists, conservatives, and Creek freedmen leaders all recognized the importance of Creek education on two levels. First, they wished to use education to remake Creek society, though they differed in what this society should look like. Second, they understood the importance of their own education and an educated citizenry as a defense mechanism against the United States. When clearly threatened by the U.S., Creeks who remained politically divided over several issues collectively pointed to education an indication of their functionality as a nation. Creeks consistently highlighted their institution-building, specifically their national school system, as one strategy to demonstrate their capacity for self-government and commitment to national advancement.

On several occasions during his twelve years as principal chief, Checote stressed the importance of education for protecting the Creek Nation against U.S. colonial policies. He often used a specific rhetorical tactic: while praising the national schools, he reminded federal officials that Creeks had not been given ample time to master the

[88] "R.A. Leslie to the Committee on Education, n.d." CNR, roll 49, slide 38850.
[89] For more on R.A. Leslie and the boarding school see Zellar, *African Creeks*, 118-121.

English language, let alone American law. Therefore, the federal government could not reasonably expect Creeks to hand over their land and forfeit Creek citizenship. For instance, in 1870 he responded to a Congressional proposal that the Five Nations must come under the jurisdiction of a U.S. territorial government, declaring, "We are sensible of the fact, that a Territorial form of Government will at this time in no way benefit the Indians, but work their certain ruin." He argued, "A great majority of the Indians are those termed full-bloods, who have no education, nor can they even speak the English language, and no such race of people can take upon themselves the laws made by the white man -- a people different in language, and customs -- and prosper under them." Checote, himself a "full-blood," asserted that the majority of Creeks were not prepared to navigate the social, political, and economic ways of white society. Thus, placing the Creek Nation under the jurisdiction of a U.S. territorial government would lead to their certain demise.[90]

At the Indian Peace Commission in 1871, Checote made this point abundantly clear. He praised the progress of the thirty-two neighborhood schools and the two manual labor schools "filled with pupils." He stated that the Creek government and its citizens wished for the opportunity to continue to build their own national institutions and then to reap the benefits of their efforts. The federal officials and missionary teachers, he asserted, should wish for the same since they had helped plant the early roots of the Creek education system. "If he had planted a field and saw it growing prosperously he should feel that it deserved his careful attention until the grain had ripened and the harvest was gathered," argued Checote. He then warned the delegates

[90] L.N. Robinson, Supt. of Indian Affairs to Ely Park, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, August 1, 1869, *ARCIA*, 1869, 840; "Cherokee Advocate-Address of Samuel Checote, June 18, 1870", Samuel Checote Collection, box 1, folder 1, WHC.

that the bills to establish a territorial government threatened Creeks' progress. "We have heard that bills to organize a territorial government for our country are being pressed upon Congress, and it alarms our people. If they are passed and become a law, it will let into our country a large class of bad white men with whom our people, under the present laws, cannot cope," he advised the federal delegates. To support further his point, he directly invoked disparities in English education, "It would be like placing an uneducated boy in college to place these people in the midst of crafty, designing, and educated white men, with all the law on their side."[91] In other words, white men used their educational advantages to colonize Native peoples, and the Creeks wished to educate themselves as a defensive measure against Euro-American tactics. This strategy made clear to those present that if Euro-Americans actually desired an educated, "civilized" Creek people, territorialization would be antithetical to that goal.

The threat of U.S. colonial policies escalated during the Ward Coachman administration. In response, leaders presented federal officials with a united front aimed at flaunting their attainment of "civilization" and national progress as arguments against further intrusion. Boosterism intensified and Congress made several attempts at "Oklahoma bills," aimed at opening up Indian Territory for up for white settlement. A subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Territories headed by South Carolina Senator John Patterson launched an investigation into the Five Tribes' attitudes towards territorialization. Although many of the hearings were held in Washington, D.C., delegates of the committee travelled to Indian Territory in November 1878 to hear testimony from citizens of the Native nations. Concerned about presenting a united front, the council agreed to lift political restrictions on Lochar Harjo and to settle

[91] Samuel Checote's Address to the Indian Peace Commission, *ARCIA*, 1871, 596.

educational discrepancies in the funding of the freedmen schools. Three educated statesmen, Pleasant Porter, David M. Hodge, and George W. Stidham, represented the Creek Nation, but the committee questioned a number of citizens. Those who testified included freedmen, "full-blood" Creeks, "mixed blood" Creeks, and white missionaries residing within the nation.

The questions and answers highlighted the progress of the nation, its capacity for self-governance, and the Creeks' unanimous opposition to territorialization. The progress of the national school issues also loomed large in the testimonies. Federal officials accused the Creek Nation of misappropriating school funds to send delegations to D.C. Nevertheless, several witnesses, including George Washington Grayson, testified to the tremendous amount of national funding allocated towards the schools. The delegates successfully proved that "only $11,000 per annum are set apart for school purposes; and the official records of the Creek Nation will show that the Creeks have expended annually, amounts to ranging from $24,000 to $27,000 per annum (and in one instance $31,000) for the last ten years."[92] Thus, funding delegations did not detract from the support of the schools. Testimony proved that delegates had worked to protect everything Creek citizens built post-removal, including the national institutions.

Commissioners and the Creek delegates also carefully questioned each witness about the progress of schools and general "intelligence" in the nation. White missionaries W.S. Robertson and H.F. Buckner, who were sympathetic with Creeks' efforts to resist territorialization, testified that the schools were on par or even more advanced than those in the states. Buckner, who had previously served as a missionary

[92] *Senate Committee on the Territories Investigation into Sentiments in the Indian Territory Regarding Establishment of a Territorial Government, etc.*, 45th Congress, 1879, Senate Report 744, Serial Set Id: 1839, 77.

in Kentucky, stated that educated Creeks "are more intelligent than the people there." Creek witnesses who had also spent time outside of their nation also testified that their schools equaled U.S. common schools and freedmen schools. Grayson, for instance, highlighted his own college education in Arkansas and asserted, "In some parts of the country our people compare favorably in point of intelligence." Likewise, when asked how the freedmen schools liked to those in Louisiana, Robert A. Leslie attested that they also compared positively.[93]

Several leading "full blood" representatives from conservative districts also provided key testimony. They confirmed that the people in their districts were satisfied with the system of government, the schools, and the common land system. They reiterated that they did not want any change to their nation. Several of them also challenged widespread stereotypes perpetuated by federal officials of "full blood" Creeks as uneducated. Their testimonies highlighted growing Creek literacy and the impact of the neighborhood schools among conservative Creeks. Itsharsharjo, a member of the House of Warriors, testified that although he was not literate in English, he could read and write in the Muskogee language. Similarly, James Gray, who also served in the council, stated that he too could not read in English but could in his native language. He also praised the progress of the national schools. Rolling McIntosh, who self-identified as a "full blood" Creek lawyer, stated that he had studied Creek law. He explained that Creek laws had been written in both Muskogee and English and that readily available interpreters translated all political business in the nation in both languages. Principal Chief Ward Coachman, who represented not only his conservative followers but also the nation as a whole, maintained that all Creeks wholeheartedly

[93] Senate Report 744, Serial Set Id: 1839, 672-677, 696-697, 702-705.

opposed territorialization and argued that Creeks had effectively controlled their own national affairs, chief among them the schools.[94]

The testimony of Creek freedmen served as the lynchpin for the case made by the Creek delegates against the need for federal interference. Monday Marshall, the first freedmen to testify in the hearings, nearly compromised the united front presented by the witnesses. He suggested disparities in the education system still held back the freedmen. He stated that the existing freedmen schools were not filling the needs of his people and that the Takekee and North Fork neighborhoods lacked even subpar schools. He also asserted that the races did not mix in the national schools. Although he confirmed that the council had provided a mission school for freedmen, he argued that even this was tenuous explaining, "We are to occupy it for one session. I do not know how it will turn out. I do not know whether it will be turned over to us or not; we cannot tell." Marshall further testified that the schools "are well conducted, but still it seems our children are not advancing much in education"; he did not believe that "the colored people" received their share of the school fund. In this case, Marshall's identity as a freedmen and sense of distinction from the rest of Creek society led him to testify in a way that would potentially harm the entire Creek Nation. Yet, he made his desire for inclusion quite clear. Despite this open showing of discontent, G.W. Stidham severely questioned him to break down his statements and highlight the recent efforts made toward the inclusion of freedmen in the nation.[95]

Subsequent freedmen testimony further bolstered the Creek delegates' efforts to present a united front. They affirmed their people voted and exercised equal rights in

[94] Senate Report 744, Serial Set Id: 1839, 686, 691-694, 706-707.
[95] Senate Report 744, Serial Set Id: 1839, 678-683.

the nation. Given the recent concession on the part of the council to open the boarding school, most of them spoke favorably about the state of freedmen education. Sugar George, Ned Robins, Jesse Franklin, Simon Brown, and Joseph Howard all confirmed that their schools were progressing and they received a fair share of the school fund guaranteed by treaty annuities.[96]

Altogether, the diverse Creek citizens successfully argued against territorialization because it would be detrimental to the nation as a whole. Furthermore, they emphasized their ability to self-govern by stressing their education system, which they had made a national priority over the past decade and a half regardless of internal disputes.[97] Thus, Creek leaders and representatives of various Creek communities and political parties worked to highlight their Native controlled education as a defensive measure against U.S. encroachment.

Creeks did not use this strategy in isolation. Instead, they did so as part of a broader collective tactic employed by the Native nations during Reconstruction. Shortly after the close of the Civil War, leaders of these nations made collaborative decisions to strive for "civilization" as a means of protecting their various nations and jointly defending Indian Territory from U.S. colonization. For instance, at the 1870 Grand Council of Indian Nations, representatives of the Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, Osage, and Chickasaw nations articulated their sentiments regarding "civilization" and imperial threats. At Checote's invitation, leaders of the various tribes met to reestablish diplomatic ties in the aftermath of the war and to discuss jointly "the threatened invasion of their rights by the numerous measures introduced into Congress." An

[96] Senate Report 744, Serial Set Id: 1839, 684-685, 687-688, 695-698
[97] Senate Report 744, Serial Set Id: 1839, 684-685, 687-688, 695-698.

attendee at the council reported that the delegates felt "the superior character of the whites is due to industry and knowledge and that they must strive to acquire that knowledge and imitate that industry if they need expect to hold even their present standing in the scale of civilization." Education was the key to this knowledge and, thus, the key to "civilization" and future survival. Representatives agreed that they must embrace modernity and "march to the 'music of the times'" if they would "retain all that is dear to them – their homes and institutions."[98] For the delegates at the 1870 Grand Council and other progressive leaders among the Native nations, the embrace of "civilization" seemed the only sure way that they could survive within the expanding U.S.

Over the next decade, leaders among the Native nations increasingly turned to education as a mechanism for nation-building. Many leaders among these nations continued to co-opt the ideology and the tools of "civilization" to shape their own national ideologies and visions of the future in the wake of expanding federal power. For instance, Isaac Garvin, a Choctaw principal chief characterized the importance of schools for Choctaw national survival with his statement, "'I say educate! Educate! Or we perish!'"[99] Checote, Garvin, and many other leaders of the Five Nations envisioned Native-initiated, western-style education as a way to ensure that their polities would continue to endure.

In the Cherokee Nation, William Potter Ross, who served as principal chief from 1866-1867 and then again from 1872-1875 consistently asserted that education was the Cherokee Nation's path to not only to survival but also to greatness. A Princeton

[98] "1870 Grand Council," Samuel Checote Collection, box 1, folder 2, WHC.

[99] Dennis B. Miles, "Choctaw Schools," Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture, www.okhistory.org (accessed November 30, 2015).

educated lawyer, journalist, and statesman, Ross had served as a leading architect of the Cherokee national school system since the 1840s and continued to expand the system during Reconstruction. "Cynics may sneer and selfish vulgarity scoff at the idea of Indian education and Indian civilizations, but we know that it is making hopeful advances in this territory. Sustain it. Speed it onward, but see it is thorough, practical, and pure," he urged Cherokee citizens. He stressed that education was the key to Cherokees' future and would come with a huge payoff: "May these efforts be the silver lining to years of adversity, the golden bow arching the eastern horizon after the storm has spent its fury and passed away." Potter even supposed that if the public school system continued to thrive, the Cherokee Nation had the potential to not only remain enlightened but also even surpass the U.S. For Potter, and other leaders among the Native nations, an educated citizenry and "civilization" more broadly seemed to offer the best hope for the continued survival of their nations, as well the path to prosperity within the U.S. imperial system.[100]

Leaders of the Native nations in Indian Territory entered into an ongoing dialogue, not only with each other but also with U.S. officials over the relationship between education and sovereignty. Federal officials recognized the defensive strategy of progressive nationalists to highlight their own education and the success of schools in their nation but worked to use it against Creeks in their efforts towards territorialization. For instance, in 1876 Commissioner of Indian Affairs J.Q. Smith insinuated that the land base of the Five Nation should be territorialized because their attainments in

[100] William Potter Ross, *The Life and Times of Hon. William P. Ross* (Ft. Smith: Weldon & Williams Printers, 1893), 154-155; See James W. Parins, *Literacy and Intellectual Life in the Cherokee Nation, 1820-1906* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 201), 129, 196 for additional information on Ross's role in Cherokee education.

"civilization" prepared them "to be capable of appreciating and profiting by a government of this character, and the remainder." He simultaneously insisted that under federal control, "the wilder and wholly uneducated tribes could be brought to feel its force in restraint and education."[101] In other words, indigenous peoples were damned if they were educated and damned if they were not. Within the system of settler colonialism, education served as a powerful discursive tool to justify the end goal – colonization of indigenous land. Despite the clear ploys of the federal government, a cohort of progressive political leaders among the Native nations maintained that they had progressed towards "civilization" and were capable of managing their own national welfare without interference from the federal government.

In the Creek Nation, the effects of progressive Creek nationalists' efforts at institution-building and conservative Creeks and Afro-Creeks' attempts to democratize the national school system had noticeably affected the nation by the end of Reconstruction. In 1878, twenty-eight day schools and two mission schools operated in Creek country. The national council contributed $26,500 towards education - $12,000 for the day schools, $11,000 for the mission schools, and $3,500 to support the eighteen male students in U.S. colleges. Out of a population of 14,260 Creek citizens – including Indian, black, and white - 3,000 Indians could read in English, Creek, or both, and 500 Afro-Creeks were literate as well. The ability to speak English was even more widespread: 1,200 "mixed bloods," 5,000 "full bloods," and the entire population of

[101] Report of J.Q. Smith, Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, *ARCIA*, 1876, 390-391.

Afro-Creeks totaling 2,500 were reported as English speakers.[102] Thus, the reconstructed Creek Nation was also an increasingly educated one.

Unlike the pre-removal era, the U.S. government did not impose education on the majority of Creeks as a colonial tool during Reconstruction. Instead, a diverse set of Creek citizens – including freedmen – refused to allow this national institution to become the bastion of a select few. Moreover, the Creek Council effectively negotiated political control over their own schools. Citizens of the Creek Nation with diverse racial and class identities, cultural orientations, and political inclinations asserted their rights to education and debated the role it should play in the future of their nation. This is not to say that traditional forms of Creek education did not endure alongside this new institutional form. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the autonomy of nineteenth-century indigenous nations in building, contesting, and participating in their own political and social institutions, such as the national school systems that emerged among the Five Nations.

In their important study of indigenous education and self-determination in the 20th century, K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Thereas L. McCarty argue that the history of American Indian education "illustrates the costs of repressive, standardizing schooling that abrogates the rights of local choice and control." Although this generalization accurately describes federal Indian education, the Creek Nation, as well as the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Chickasaw nations, do not fit this model. The Five Tribes built systems of education within the bounds of their nations and under the control of their national governments. This allowed them to exercise successfully the "rights of local choice and control." While the colonial power of the federal government still

[102] Senate Report 744, Serial Set Id: 1839, 112.

loomed large over their nations, they continuously bucked U.S. authority to pursue their own national interests. Lomawaima and McCarty suggest, "The education of American Indian children has been at the very center of the battleground between federal and tribal powers."[103] During the mid to late nineteenth century, the sovereign indigenous nations in Indian Territory were winning the battle.

[103] K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty, *Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* (New York: Teachers' College Press, 2006), 5.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CREEK EDUCATION, CULTURE, AND NATIONHOOD IN THE AGE OF ASSIMILATION

In 1878, U.S. Army Captain Richard Henry Pratt escorted sixty-two Kiowa, Comanche, Cheyenne, and Arapaho men to Hampton Institute, an agricultural and industrial school for freedmen. Before arriving at Hampton, the men made a long journey in captivity. Pratt previously arrested these men for alleged crimes during the Indian Wars and then held them at Ft. Sill in Indian Territory. There, they remained in legal limbo. Although General Philip H. Sheridan attempted to try them as prisoners of war, the attorney general declared this illegal since they were "wards" of the nation. Subsequently, Pratt transferred the prisoners to Ft. Marion in Florida and then finally to Hampton Institute, where they were to receive vocational training alongside African Americans. Following this self-proclaimed successful experiment in Native American industrial training, Pratt founded Carlisle Indian Industrial School in 1879. It became the new model for federal Indian education based on his philosophy of "Kill the Indian, save the man."[1]

The same year Carlisle opened Alice Marshall was born in the Creek Nation. While many Natives of her generation would go on to attend federal boarding schools like Carlisle, she had a different experience. When she reached school age, she began attending one of the Creek day schools near her home in Eufaula; there, she learned from Ellen Perryman, an experienced teacher who had herself been educated in the Creek national school system. Marshall then enrolled at the Eufaula boarding school

[1] Donal F. Lindsey, *Indians at Hampton Institute, 1877-1923* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 27-33.

for her secondary education. Here, too, she worked with "Indian" teachers, including George Stidham, "an educated Creek who lived near town" and served as superintendent. Her grandmother even worked as the cook at the school. When reflecting on her experience at Eufaula, Marshall recalled, "None of this work was hard for me to learn for Mother had already been, teaching me." Comfort and familiarity framed her education. She attended school in her hometown where she learned from friends and neighbors in institutions funded and administered by her national government.[2] These schools represented important institutions as well as centers of cultural and intellectual life in the Creek Nation. Not only did they serve as extensions of the national government, they also played an important role in community life. Thus, clear disparities existed between the experiences of Creek pupils like Alice Marshall and those Native American students who attended off-reservation federal boarding schools during the late nineteenth century.

These divergent experiences took shape in a period of intensified American efforts to colonize western territories. From Reconstruction through the 1890s, the expanding federal government attempted to consolidate imperial control over North America through the conquest of land, the erosion of competing sovereignties, and the cultural destruction of indigenous peoples. As the Indian Wars began to subside, agents of assimilationist ideology believed the "last great Indian war should be waged against the children."[3] Therefore, they worked toward "the eradication of all traces of tribal identity and culture" and their replacement with the "values of white civilization"

[2] Interview with Alice Marshall Grayson, ID: 7887, Vol. 35, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC

[3] David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 336.

through boarding school education.[4] Federal officials and social reformers, influenced by Progressive Era ideologies, racial constructions, and social values, sought to incorporate Native Americans into a broader homogenous American state.

As many scholars of Native American education have demonstrated, the majority of Native peoples rejected attempts to erase the cultural and political identities as indigenous peoples. Instead, they actively struggled to maintain tribal sovereignty, citizenship in their own independent nations, and distinct indigenous cultures. By placing Native American voices at the center of boarding school narratives, Tsianina Lomawaima, Brenda Child, and others have established that although boarding schools were repressive institutions aimed at cultural destruction, they allowed students to form peer-group solidarity and create distinctly Native spaces. In turn, they strengthened tribal identities and forged pan-tribal connections.[5] This, of course, led to the failure of boarding schools and assimilation policies more broadly. Despite these interpretations, the larger narrative of Native American education largely characterizes indigenous peoples as recipients of imposed Euro-American education and its intended corollaries – Christianity, English literacy, private landownership, capitalist ethos, and democratic political systems. Neither the Creek Nation nor the other Native nations in Indian Territory fit within this interpretative model.[6] Subsequently, they have remained largely absent from studies on Native American education in the second half of the nineteenth.

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[4] Adams, *Education for Extinction*, 335.

[5] K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Brenda Child, *Boarding School Seasons American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

[6] David Wallace Adams, for instance, "specifically exempted" the schools of the "so called 'five civilized tribes'" from *Education for Extinction* because they do not fit the framework. Adams, *Education for Extinction*, x.

In the Creek Nation, indigenous peoples took a proactive approach to formal education and literacy, which became an important part of their identity. As anthropologist Linda K.Neuman suggests, schools must be understood "as potential sources of new identities for Indian students rather than as simply sites of cultural persistence or loss."[7] In the Creek Nation, students, teachers, and administrators created new cultural meanings at the schools. This process, however, was not limited to school spaces, nor was it separate from larger national developments as families, leaders, and the public more broadly defined the value of education. Thus, Creek education writ large did not simply degrade an unchanging culture. Instead, it contributed to new and shifting cultural identities, political ideologies, and racial consciousness during the late nineteenth century.

This chapter explores the ways in which the Creek Nation not only used education defensively against U.S. colonizers but also offensively to build and strengthen their own national culture. It demonstrates that the Creeks' national education agenda did not erode the political and cultural identity of its citizens. Rather it reinforced a sense of nationhood and led to new forms of cultural production that enhanced public and intellectual life rather than threatening it. To highlight this process, the chapter first investigates how, within the bounds of the Creek Nation, a triangulated relationship between schools, print and oral culture, and public ceremonies reinforced Creek identity, not only for students but the public more broadly. Second, it demonstrates that this proved such a powerful combination that even those students who travelled to attend schools in the U.S. considered it a duty to their nation and did not

[7] Linda K. Neuman, *Indian Play: Indigenous Identities at Bacone College* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 20.

suffer from the same forms of emotional trauma, cultural degradation, and isolation from their communities associated with the boarding school movement. Subsequently, Creeks defied late nineteenth century ideologies of Native American racial and cultural inferiority, posed a clear challenge to assimilation policies, and seriously complicated the so-called "Indian Question."

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During the late nineteenth century, Creek leaders made concerted nation-building efforts aimed at achieving national "progress" for the benefit of citizens. They also put Creek "civilization" on display to make a powerful political argument to Euro-Americans. Bilingual literacy and print culture, both outgrowths of the Creeks' education system, became central to Creek national "progress" and culture. Scholars often credit the federal boarding school system with producing the first large-scale, pan-tribal generation of literate Native peoples and marking the beginning of modern Native intellectual history. Collectively, however, the Southeastern Native nations widely adopted alphabetic writing, public print culture, and various forms of literacy during the nineteenth century. As historian Philip Round suggests, the Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles "engaged in serious print culture interventions within the dominant public sphere" prior to and following removal."[8] In Creek country, English literacy initially spread as a politically and socially disruptive force, increasingly becoming a prerequisite for leadership during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. In the decades that followed, however, leaders recognized the power of writing in diplomatic negotiations with the United States and national politics,

[8] Phillip Round, *Removable Type: The History of the Book in Indian Country* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 132.

using it in treaty negotiations and then adopting a written constitution.[9] Creek schools facilitated English literacy because leaders deemed it necessary for the attainment of "civilization" and the survival of the nation.

English education did not negate the use of the Muskogee language. Instead, schools and educated Creeks helped foster a Muskogee print culture. Bilingual literacy and the production texts in the Creek Nation must be understood as a direct product of the schools. This differed considerably from the Cherokee Nation, where Sequoyah independently produced a syllabary without any formal education and without prior English literacy. Because Muskogee literacy stemmed from Creek schools during the second half of the nineteenth century, both English and Muskogee texts functioned not only as "interventions within the dominant public sphere" but also as a hybrid cultural production of internal importance to the Creek Nation.[10] The ability to read and write in both English and Muskogee served as a clear indication of Creek "civilization" to Euro-Americans. It also increasingly became a common everyday practice among citizens and reinforced a sense of cultural distinctiveness.

The Muskogee alphabetic system emerged from an ongoing collaboration between missionary educators and Creek students, especially at Tullahassee, the wellspring of Creek literacy. Beginning in the 1850s, students worked with the Robertson family to translate texts that became widespread over the next several decades. For instance, David Winslett, a gifted interpreter, teamed up with his

[9] Claudio Saunt, *A New Order of Things: Property, Power, and the Transformation of the Creek Indians, 1733-1816* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 186-204).

[10] Round, *Removable Type*, 132.

instructor to produce readers for Creek children in the schools.[11] Educators and preachers throughout the nation used these readers to teach students and community members. With the assistance of several students, William's wife, Ann Eliza, the more skilled linguist, also translated a number of Christian texts into the Muskogee language.[12] These included five editions of the *New Testament*, the *Old Testament*, *Muskogee Hymns, Muskogee Sunday School Song Book, Poor Sarah,* and several other religious tracts published by the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society. They also compiled a Muskogee dictionary.[13] Robertson's work garnered national attention from federal officials, missionaries, and linguists in the U.S.[14] In 1882, University of Wooster in Ohio even granted her an honorary doctorate.[15] Despite her accolades, Robertson recognized that her linguistic work was only possible in collaboration with native Muskogee speakers. She readily admitted her dependence, explaining, "So I have to get the help of those who have spoken it all their lives in correcting it before I can be sure I have it expressed in the plainest and the best way."[16]

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[11] Winslett and Robertson translated McGuffey's 1st Reader into the Muskogee language and published the volume as Nakcokv es Keretv Enhvtecesk (Creek First Reader) in 1856. Winslett also translated a number of Scriptures, hymnals, and other religious tracts into Muskogee. In 1871, they published the Nakcokv Eskerrevt Esvhokkolat (Creek Second Reader. See W.S. Robertson and David Winslett, *Nakcokv es Kerretv Enhvteceskv* (*Muskogee or Creek First Reader*), 5th edition (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Christian Education, 1934); W.S. Robertson and David Winslett, Mvskoke Nakcokv Eskerretv Esvhokkolat (Creek Second Reader), 1st edition (New York: American Tract Society, 1871).

[12] Althea Bass, *The Story of Tullahassee* (Oklahoma City: Semco Color Press, 1960), 105-111.

[13] For a complete compilation of Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson's translations see "Notes and Documents" *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 37 (Spring 1959): 108-122.

[14] Robertson's determination to reach Creeks in their own language, both at Tullahassee Manual Labor School and in her work throughout the nation, set her apart from assimilationists during the late nineteenth century. Whereas teachers and administrators at off-reservation boarding schools prohibited and punished Indian language usage, Robertson took the opposite approach. She immersed herself in the Muskogee language and not only encouraged, but also facilitated widespread Muskogee print culture. See Ann Eliza Robertson, "Of the first forty boys…" series 1, box 3, folder 1, AMRC and A.E.W. Robertson to Leonard A. Gould, Sept. 25, 1896, series 2, box 12, folder 1, AMRC for more on her linguistic work and her sense of duty to the Creek Nation.

[15] University of Wooster is now College of Wooster.

[16] A.E.W. Robertson to Leonard A. Gould, Sept. 25, 1896, series 2, box 12, folder 1, AMRC.

Students at Tullahassee and educated men in the Creek Nation deserved much of the credit for transmitting and perfecting their language in written form. After reviewing *Muskogee Hymns*, for instance, Wash Grayson wrote to Robertson his "views regarding on particular combination of letters." He explained, "In M. [Muskogee] we have no double letters where one is silent or useless as we find them in the English words, floss, meet, chilliness, bless and &c &c. We have but few characters, but these few are almost all distinctly sounded wherever found."[17] Others offered criticism to ensure the process of transforming their language into print did not degrade it. On one occasion, L.C. Perryman corrected Robertson's spelling of certain words based on their origins: "Thinking the word 'hauke' over carefully I am convinced to believe that I would spell it Hawke or Howke. The work originated from the word Howeceta (a verb.) as you know that a great many of our nowns are derived from verbs, or if not the verb comes from the noun."[18] Some also solicited translations as needs arose. For instance, her former student, Dorsey Fife, requested Robertson translate the Presbyterian "Form of Government Discipline Directory for Worship" and the "General Rules for Judicatories." He explained, "if that is translated in Muskogee Language the people would be more better satisfied with it."[19] Through this ongoing process, Creeks shaped the transformation of their language from an oral one to a written one.

From the 1870s onwards, texts in the Muskogee language became more available to the public.[20] In addition to the textbooks used in the schools, the Creek

[17] Grayson to Robertson, July 4, 1890, series 2, box 12, folder 1, AMRC.
[18] Legus Perryman to A.E.W. Robertson, Aug. 27, 1884, series 2, box 13, folder 3, AMRC.
[19] Dorsey Fife to A.E.W. Robertson, n.d., series 2, box 11, folder 12, AMRC.
[20] Recently scholars have begun to consider the relationship between the history of education and the history of print culture. In *Education and the Culture of Print in Modern America*, editor Adam Nelson writes "Education and print culture are co-constructed, and neither can flourish without the other. Without an educated citizenry, print culture would falter, and without a diverse supply of print, education

Council also subsidized the publication of religious texts. Though they recognized there would be "no adequate financial returns from such an investment," the people of the nation would be "benifitted [sic] by the Scriptures."[21] Teachers and parents used the Creek readers to teach children while churches used the Bibles, hymnals, and other religious tracts at Sunday schools, camp meetings, and church services. Creek individuals frequently wrote to Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson requesting copies of the various texts, which she received directly from the publishers. One inquired, "And have you got are Creek Holy bible. Send it to me…Tell me all about it."[22] Jim P. Harjo sent several requests for as many as thirty copies of the New Testament, the Book of Psalms, and other texts that he distributed to encourage others to read.[23] Tupper Dunn at the Wewoka Church reported to her, "I giving almost all of my leaflets to whom can read creek, and they are very much glad of it," when he ordered more.[24] Still supply could not keep up with demand. Lou Clinton, a Tullahassee graduate, wrote that she was trying to establish a Sunday school in Red Fork but explained, "we have no books or papers & of course cannot do much until we get some."[25] This desire for readers and religious tracts in Muskogee by English literate Creeks demonstrates the degree to which bilingualism became a common feature of society.

Newspapers, another outgrowth of the schools, also added to the burgeoning Muskogee print culture beginning in the 1870s. In December 1870, *Our Monthly*, the first newspaper in the Creek Nation, began as a Tullahassee school publication and a

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would likewise fail." See Adam R. Nelson and John L. Rudolph, eds., *Education and the Culture of Print in Modern America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

[21] Wm. I. Haven, American Bible Society, to A.E.W. Robertson, May 20, 1905, series 2, box 10, folder 1, AMRC.

[22] Leslie Baker to Alice Robertson, 1903, series 2, box 1, folder, 6, AMRC.

[23] Jim P. Harjo to A.E.W. Robertson, 1902-1905, series 2, box 12, folder 1, AMRC.

[24] Tupper Dunn to A.E.W. Robertson, May 27, 1901, series 2, box 11, folder 1, AMRC.

[25] Lou Clinton to A.E.W. Robertson, Feb. 24, 1886, series 2, box 11, folder 8, AMRC.

collaborative project between the Robertsons and Creek scholars. Its stated purpose was "the moral and intellectual improvement" of the students.[26] The first issues featured essays by students written in both Muskogee and English on a number of topics. Some contained Christian overtones and belief in a strong work ethic--values emphasized at Tullahassee--while others mused on nature, homes, and families.

Several of the students' compositions reflect how individuals viewed their educational experiences in the national schools and how it shaped their outlook as individuals, community members, and Creek citizens. In an article titled "Idleness," Phebe Perryman explained the responsibility that students had to take advantage of the educational opportunities provided by the national school system: "Oh how precious are our privileges. We should never idle our time away. It would be very wrong indeed, for our friends send us away to school to get wisdom, when they can hardly spare us from home."[27] In another piece, Lewis Gargee wrote, "So let us try & learn as much as we can while we are at school, because if we do not study hard, and try to learn, we cannot be of any use to our nation when we leave school. If we want to learn, we must love our books, and study them hard. Then when we leave school we can help our nation, and ourselves."[28] Their words suggest the effectiveness of education as nation-building mechanism and the role of print culture as an extension of it.

During its first two years, *Our Monthly* remained handwritten and irregularly issued, but with the assistance of the Creek Council, it expanded its scope and

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[26] *Our Monthly* (Tullahassee, Creek Nation), April 27, 1971, series 3, box 9, folder 2, AMRC.

[27] Phebe A. Perryman, "Idleness," *Our Monthly* (Tullahassee, Creek Nation), April 27, 1971, series 3, box 9, folder 2, AMRC.

[28] Lewis Gargee, "Play," *Our Monthly* (Tullahassee, Creek Nation), April 27, 1971, series 3, box 9, folder 2, AMRC.

circulation in the years that followed. In 1873, the council granted Tullahassee School a printing press. The first printed issue announced that in light of the generous gift from the nation, the paper would now seek "to remove the complaint among the Creeks that they have no paper." It also solicited material from beyond the student body, informing citizens "Either Creek or English articles for our paper will be thankfully received."[29] Because of this, Creeks with different cultural and political orientations began to contribute to and read the periodical. For instance, Koweta Micco, a political conservative who served for two decades as the Coweta district judge, wrote a frustrated letter to Ann Eliza Robertson after he submitted an article for publication and had not seen it in print. He wrote, "I am sending you all one again for you all to put it with your monthly paper."[30] In 1874, the publication began to reach a broader audience when members of the Creek Council, who wished free issues of the paper to be widely distributed among the citizens of the nation, appropriated one hundred dollars for the Robertsons to print 1,000 copies.[31]

Our Monthly regularly ran news stories and editorials that became a medium for reinforcing the importance of education as an important component of Creek cultural life. For instance, announcements concerning school events, results of public examinations, and speeches by education officials regularly ran in its pages.[32] Not only that, it served as a space in which Creeks debated the value of English and Muskogee literacy and education. This reflected the prominence of literacy in public discourse and the active participation of citizens in shaping schools to fit their needs. For example,

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[29] *Our Monthly* (Tullahassee, Creek Nation), Feb. 1873, series 3, box 9, folder 3, AMRC.
[30] Cowith Micco to A.E.W. Robertson, June 15, 1874, series 2, box 13, folder 1, AMRC.
[31] Virginia E. Lauderdale, "Tullahassee Mission," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 26 (Fall 1948): 295-296.
[32] *Our Monthly*, October, 1975, Edward Ayer Collection, Newberry Library.

one issue ran a transcript of an address that Samuel Grayson delivered before the General Council of Indian Territory, outlining how the "Muscogees are progressing and not retrograding." In it, he explained, "One of the results of the education among the Muskokees is the existence of an alphabet suited to their tongue, by which means, portions of the Holy Bible as well as hymns have been translated into their language, and which many are able to read and comprehend."[33]

While it is easy to pose indigeneity in opposition to the colonial tools of Christianity and literacy, by the late nineteenth century Creeks had adapted both of these and made them part of their cultural identities. The increasingly widespread Muskogee literacy and its popularity in Christian worship also prompted many Creeks to question the efficacy of using the Creek schools to teach English. For instance, an editorial in the March, 1874 edition of *Our Monthly* stated, "[w]e must educate our people or perish as a nation…For a quarter of a century we have been striving, to education our youth in English school, and the experiment here, as everywhere has utterly failed…Is it not high time for the nation to seek better methods to enlighten, and elevate the masses."[34] Another suggested that Creek children would be able to learn to read, write, and move on to more advanced systems of learning more quickly if they could do so in their own language. Even in *Our Monthly,* articles written in Muskogee soon overwhelmingly outnumbered English pieces. Although Creek leaders continued to support English literacy and advocate for its importance to the survival of the nation, Muskogee literacy and texts expanded also expanded.

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[33] "A Talk As Delivered by Sam. Grayson before the General Council of Indian Territory, May 6th, 1874," *Our Monthly* (Tullahassee, Creek Nation), June 1874, series 3, box 9, folder 6, AMRC.

[34] *Our Monthly,* March, 1874, series 3, box 9, folder 7, AMRC.

Unlike the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws who developed their own newspapers before the Civil War, *Our Monthly* remained the only Creek periodical until 1876, when Cherokee editor, William Potter Ross began to publish the *Indian Journal* in Muskogee, Creek Nation. One year later, a joint stock company of twenty-one men, including several prominent Creek businessmen and four future principal chiefs – Joseph M. Perryman, Ward Coachman, George Washington Grayson, and Pleasant Porter – purchased the *Indian Journal* and moved it to Eufaula.[35] The journal operated under the motto "We seek to enlighten," and its pages stressed the importance of education, intellectual development, and progress in the Creek Nation. Nevertheless, the stockholders had a far more political agenda in establishing the paper – one that directly tied to the Creek nation-building project and the larger effort to preserve the sovereign Native nations in Indian Territory. As George Washington Grayson explained, "The Journal started out to defend Indian rights based upon certain cardinal principles."[36]

News articles and editorials often stressed the importance of Native sovereignty with a particular emphasis on education. As historian Mary Jane Warde explains, "The *Indian Journal*, perhaps more clearly than any other public voice in the Creek Nation, spoke for the Creek nationalists who believed that some adaption of the Anglo-American ways was necessary to protect Creek sovereignty."[37] For instance, one 1877 editorial praised Principal Chief Ward Coachman's annual address for its "straight forward dealing with the questions that affect the Creek people in their relations to one another or to the Federal Government" and called his recommendations "eminently

[35] Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation*, 102.
[36] G.W. Grayson to Hon. N.B. Moore, May 9, 1890, series 2, box 6, folder 4, AMRC.
[37] Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation*, 102.

wise, practical, and just." Coachman's suggestions for expanding the education system garnered the most praise in this editorial, and the author noted, "We heartily endorse, as we believe will be the case with nearly every member of the Nation, his desire to sustain and encourage the educational institutions."[38] Print culture, particularly the *Indian Journal*, allowed leaders to promote Creek nationalism among the growing literate population.[39]

The *Indian Journal* also served as a way to communicate to citizens in disparate communities throughout the nation that the preservation of Creek autonomy depended on their participation in national institutions. For instance, one piece called on neighborhoods to support the national schools by providing proper facilities. While this may seem like a provincial concern, it was not. Instead, the author made the case that it was of the utmost importance in preventing further encroachments on Creek sovereignty:

> This is the one step the Creek Nation must take to compel other Nations or communities to respect your rights. Make ourselves their equals in education labor, and they will never dare to trample on your vested rights. What you have suffered in the past, has been the result of an unscrupulous superior intelligence acting upon your simplicity for their own aggrandizement without a thought of the injury you might receive. You have been injured, despoiled, and defrauded cruelly in the past….Do this, and we answer for the American people, that they will see your treaties and rights respected. –Let them see and know that you are determined to claim your equality with them in education and in labor, and they will say to the petty politicians in power – the creatures of their creations: Stay your hand![40]

The message to readers of the *Indian Journal* in various towns was loud and clear: local support of national schools was essential for the future of the Creek Nation.

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[38] "Indian Journal, October 13, 1877," Ward Coachman Collection, box 1, folder 2, WHC.

[39] For a theoretical overview on the relationship between print culture and nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York City: Verso, 1991).

[40] *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation), Nov. 2, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

The idea that, through education and literacy, Native peoples could equal or possibly surpass Euro-Americans in intellect also had a great deal of appeal. To reinforce this notion, the *Indian Journal* printed excerpts from the *American Journal of Education*. One outlined the long list of needs for Missouri schools, including uniformity and supply in books, more money for education expenses, longer school terms, and compulsory attendance. Another discussed the illiteracy rates in the states: "In Alabama 53 percent of the voters are illiterate…in Florida, 54 percent; in Mississippi 53 per cent; in Tennessee, 40 per cent. These are startling figures."[41] The numbers strengthened the idea that the public school systems in the Native nations surpassed those in the states.

In another illustrative piece, the *Indian Journal* ran a letter from Professor J.M. Harley of the Chickasaw Academy. Harley explained that as an incentive for his students to succeed, he challenged Denison High School in Texas to an academic competition. The winner would receive a banner that it would then defend in subsequent matches. The principal at the Texas School initially accepted the challenge but then withdrew. He reasoned, "If they should be so fortunate as to come off victorious, it would be no great credit to them, because everybody would expect the whites to excel the Indians; but on the contrary if the whites should be defeated the disgrace would be great indeed."[42] The principal's withdrawal suggests the success of indigenous schools. Printing this letter in the *Indian Journal* reinforced this for a wide audience.

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[41] "Educational," *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation), Nov. 2, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

[42] J.M. Hartley, "To Educators," *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation), Nov. 2, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

Since the nation-building attempts of Creek leaders had a decisively defensive and forward-looking agenda, the importance of education for their continued existence became a continuous theme in the newspaper. One editorial, for instance, appealed to the thousand students being educated. "Soon you are to take our places and shape and wield the destinies of your race, as upon the youths of the States devolves the preservation of the republican form of government adapted by the Fathers of the Republic." Not only did students have a duty to preserve their government just as white students did in the U.S., the editorial explained, "Even so devolves upon you the infinitely higher and more sacred trust – a more fearful responsibility – the preservation of your race from extinction, the saving of a home for your children."[43] As this demonstrates, articles in the *Indian Journal*, a nationalist publication, emphasized the duty of educated Creeks to not only defend their nations but also preserve the existence of their people. This message did not only appear in such lofty appeals. It also surfaced in the minutia of reports and announcements that regularly ran in print. For instance, the paper put out calls for reports of final examinations from schools across the nation: "Will friends please furnish us with such reports? They will be interesting to readers of the Indian Journal at home and abroad and preserve a record of passing events for the future history of the race."[44] As even this brief snippet suggests, the publication of reports on schools' progress in the *Indian Journal* presented a new way of preserving the history of the nation.

From the 1870s through the 1890s, print culture served as an emerging cultural production in which Creek people continued to express themselves. Bibles and

[43] "Carry It Home With You," *Indian Journal* (Eufaula, Creek Nation), July 12, 1877, microcopy, OHS.

[44] "Indian Schools," *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation), June 22, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

religious tracts allowed Christians to worship together and evangelize in their own language. Readers, grammar guides, and other books served as important pedagogical material for Creek teachers in the schools, as well as adults throughout the nation who wished to teach themselves how to read and write in their own language. At the same time, leaders continued to emphasize the importance of English literacy as a defensive measure to ward off further Euro-American colonization. The focus on English literacy in the national schools resulted in widespread bilingual literacy throughout the nation. Just as Lisa Brooks suggests, "Native people in the north east used writing to reclaim land and reconstruct communities," Creeks adapted writing and print culture to reformulate their cultural identities and to demonstrate their collective education and "enlightenment" to Euro-Americans.[45]

Books, newspapers, pamphlets, and other forms of print culture did not replace oral tradition. Instead, they served as a complement to it. Creek scholar Craig Womack suggests, the "oppositional thinking that separates orality and literacy wherein the oral constitutes authentic culture and the written contaminated culture" creates a false dichotomy.[46] The simultaneous use of oral culture and print culture in Creek national schools and the Creek Nation more broadly during the late nineteenth century demonstrate the ways in which citizens produced cultural forms that served their practical needs and national interests. Thus, when Euro-American colonizers used education, English literacy, and writing in an attempt to overpower indigenous cultures, their endeavors failed. Creeks instead repurposed these colonial practices and used

[45] Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), xxii.

[46] Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 15.

them to complement their culture. Schools served as the primary public spaces in which this process unfolded.

Interdependent usage of oral and print culture took on a variety of different forms. In the neighborhood schools and secondary schools, students commonly performed oral recitations in concert with reading and writing assignments. For instance, at Asbury the teachers employed the *Indian Journal* as part of the curriculum. The older male students would read the paper and then recite from memory the current events because their "education can not be complete without a knowledge of currents events detailed in the newspapers." Of course, the leading men who not only ran the newspaper but also served as national education advocates supported this and hoped the *Indian Journal* would be as "familiar to the class as their spelling book."[47] Using the newspaper in the curriculum of the national schools further bolstered nation-building efforts, while the blended use of print and oral recitation reflected hybrid cultural productions. Reading the newly published Muskogee religious tracts while singing or reciting scripture in daily worship at the mission schools and in churches represented another example of the overlapping oral and print practices.

Creeks also took the opportunity to forge a collective national identity and celebrate "civilization" by using public ceremonies, a central feature of their cultural, social, spiritual, and political customs, and adapting them to changing circumstances. Rather isolating them to the traditional town square, Creeks incorporated education ceremonies at schools into their community life. Public events offered a venue in which literate and non-literate individuals could fully participate in the national institution of

[47] "The Journal in the School," *Indian Journal* (Eufaula, Creek Nation), Oct. 6, 1877, microcopy, OHS.

education. Friends, family members, and citizens from far and wide attended the ceremonies. Announcements ran in the newspapers and the news spread by word of mouth, prompting hundreds of spectators. Wide attendance demonstrates the importance that Creeks placed upon education and the significance of ceremonies in public life. The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railway even provided excursion rates for visitors to attend closing ceremonies at the boarding schools each year.[48] This included many supportive parents and kin. Tustenuck Emanthla who reported on one such ceremony for the *Indian Journal* wrote, "We were pleased to note the large attendance of parents upon this examination, and the interest manifested by them. Many of the parents could not understand or speak English, yet the light of pride and affection beamed in their eyes as they watched their children in the various exercises."[49]

Moreover, events at the schools illustrate the ways in which Creeks integrated education into their already existing ceremonial life. Traditionally, Creeks built town square grounds that included arbors facing the cardinal directions, creating a middle space for ceremonies. In addition to spiritual use, political and diplomatic negotiations often took place under brush arbors.[50] By the late nineteenth century, arbors served as outdoor meeting places in Creek social life. Churches often held camp meetings and Sunday Schools under brush arbors, especially before they had the money or supplies to build permanent structures. Likewise, public examinations, commencement ceremonies, and events, all of which included feasting and public speeches by leading

[48] "Asbury Manual Labor School," *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation) June 29, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

[49] "Muskogee Institute Commencement Exercises," *Indian Journal*, June 29, 1867, microcopy, OHS.

[50] Womack, *Red on Red*, 42-43; Chang, *The Color of Land*, 104.

men, took place under arbors.[51] Schools served as such an important feature of Creek life that community members even adapted traditional ceremonies at the schools. For instance, in 1876 the *Indian Journal* ran an announcement that the Green Corn Dance, "Not the old style, lasting four days, but the new, with feasting and praise," would be held at the Tullahassee Manual Labor School.[52] Thus, Creeks did not simply replace ceremonial and social traditions with Euro-American practices; they adapted them. In doing so, they used schools as an extension of their identity.

Freedmen also emphasized the importance of schools and education in public ceremonies. They drew upon Creek cultural practices, as well as their own distinct citizenship status, to do so. Just like the boarding schools and neighborhood schools for other Creek children, freedman schools carried on the same public ceremonies. For instance, a visitor at the Marshall Town freedman school reported to the *Indian Journal* "The annual examination…was held today under an arbor adjoining the school house, and was witnessed by a large audience comprising parents and friends of the children as well as quite a number of visitors."[53] Despite these shared practices, Creek freedmen also commemorated separate events, which they used as further opportunities to publically reinforce the importance of education in their communities. They annually celebrated August 4th, the date on which they received official citizenship in the Creek Nation during Reconstruction. To mark the occasion, they held gatherings at which community leaders made speeches "regarding education, agriculture, and the art of self-

[51] Interview with Susan H. Tiger, ID: 6229, Vol. 91, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC; Interview with Walter Gray, ID: 13475, Vol. 35, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC; "Muskogee Institute Commencement Exercises," *Indian Journal*, June 29, 1867, microcopy, OHS.

[52] "Green Corn Dance," Indian Journal (Muskogee, Creek Nation) June 29, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

[53] "Marshall Town, Creek Nation," *Indian Journal* (Eufaula, Creek Nation), July 5, 1877, microcopy, OHS.

support."[54] Because of their previous experience with slavery and their distinct citizenship status within the Creek Nation, freedmen practices added yet another layer to Creek cultural diversity.

School ceremonies usually consisted of student performances, speeches by school officials and leading politicians, feasting, and music, all of which emphasized the importance of Creek nationhood. Such occasions provided Creek officials, educators, students, families, and citizens in general with the opportunity to simultaneously display and celebrate education as a national institution and reflection of national progress. Mrs. Eck E. Brook who attended an annual examination on July 3, 1878, at the Asbury Manual Labor School remembered the ceremony in detail decades later. She recalled that students had decorated the large, three-story brick building for the occasion with flowers, evergreen branches, and a large welcome sign. Commencement began at nine a.m. "with scripture readings and a song 'Happy Greetings,' followed by examination of classes" that "showed the exceptionally fine work on the part of both students and teachers," especially the "advanced classes in history, Latin, and mathematics." Brook was not the only impressed spectator. According to her, "The opinion of the governing body expressed was that the progress made by the school equaled that of any school of its grade in the states." The Board of Trustees used the opportunity to not only praise the students but also announce the establishment of another school and an Orphan's Asylum modeled after the one in the Cherokee Nation.[55]

[54] *Indian Journal* (Muskgoee, Creek Nation), August 10, 1876, microcopy, OHS.
[55] "Asbury Mission Commencement," Vol. 11, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.

Teachers from neighborhood schools throughout the Creek Nation, parents, and "full-bloods" with "increased interest" in schools gathered for this ceremony. The guest list did not end there. A number of distinguished visitors from the United States and leading men from the Creek Nation attended the event. These included Reverend John McIntosh, Supreme Judge of the Creek Nation, Solicitor March Thompson, Honorable Roley McIntosh, Council Member Yo-Ho Fixico, and Samuel Grayson. The Creek Superintendent of Instruction, William McCombs, and George Stidham delivered special addresses on the importance of education to the Creek Nation entirely in the Muskogee language. The day of festivities concluded with an "excellent dinner," with "everyone being invited to participate." In addition to this particular commencement ceremony at Asbury, Creek citizens actively took part in these annual events and other public gatherings at the schools.[56]

As Brooks's detailed account of the Asbury commencement suggests, school ceremonies highlight the continued use of oral culture. This occurred not as a passing tradition in favor of written culture, but rather as a clear use of literacy as a complement to Creek cultural traditions. Council members and parents expected students to learn to read and write in English in the schools, but they presented the mastery of their knowledge to the public in oral form. Moreover, the speeches provided by Creek officials allowed representatives of the national government to address students, as well as large audiences of Creek citizens, in the same way that leaders had always addressed the people – via oratory. These oral productions delivered in the Muskogee language typically exalted the importance of education to the future of Creek nationhood. Thus, applying dichotomies such as oral versus written and traditional versus progressive to

[56] "Asbury Mission Commencement," Vol. 11, Indian Pioneer Papers WHC.

define Creek culture during the late nineteenth century is untenable; Creeks utilized practices intended as colonial tools and reshaped them as their own.

Public ceremonies at schools were also distinctly political in nature. They offered an opportunity for leading officials to reinforce the importance of Creek nationhood and the advantages of education to literate and non-literate audiences. For instance, in one speech at a Tullahassee ceremony, Koweta Micco, a trustee of the school exhorted the scholars to "use their best efforts both at school and at home." Likewise, he urged them to show "allegiance to government and faithful administration of the law if Indians would retain their independence as Nations."[57] Similarly, William McCombs, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, regularly made addresses these public ceremonies and crowds of hundreds would gather to hear him speak. In one such speech, he stressed the only way to survive the colonial policies of the U.S. was to continue the Creek education system. He exclaimed:

> Education is the only means by which our people can be preserved. The uncultivated mind is similar to waste farm. Education is the good farmer who is to cultivate our minds. Education gives us foresight. If we are educated we can, by its means, see what is to be our destiny: by it we see the many threatening dangers which o'ershadow our career: 'tis education that will make good men and women.[58]

Fittingly, his speeches were hailed as a "genuine oratorical success."[59] Not only did these addresses emphasize the importance of education to Creek national identity to the

[57] *Our Monthly* (Tullahassee, Creek Nation), July 1873, series 3, box 9, folder 5, AMRC.

[58] "Muskogee Institute Commencement Exercises," *Indian Journal*, June 29, 1867, microcopy, OHS.

[59] "Asbury Manual Labor School," *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation) June 29, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

large crowds of attendees at the school events, they were also recorded and published in the newspapers.[60]

Although these forms of oratory, print culture, and public ceremonies transformed Creek culture, Creeks also sought ways to display their "civilization" and "progress to Euro-American observers. Public performances, in particular, proved a powerful medium for this. Their goal, however, was not to mimic Euro-Americans. Rather, Creeks offered the profound argument that they could simultaneously be members of an advanced and educated nation while preserving their cultural heritage. When placed within the larger context of the late nineteenth assimilation era, these performances seem all the more remarkable.

The Indian International Fair, in particular, served as an important platform for these types of performance. This annual event, primarily organized by white businessmen in Muskogee, offered a highly anticipated social gathering that stimulated the local economy. It also provided an opportunity for the various Native nations in Indian Territory to perform for Euro-American contemporaries. During the same period, similar expositions throughout the U.S. "displayed Indians in ways that reinforced white ethnocentrism and justified American conquest." Typical exhibitions of indigenous peoples portrayed stereotypes of Natives as "savage" relics of the past. Visitors to the Indian International Fair did not find these same types of portrayals.[61] During the late nineteenth century, fairs, and exhibitions commonly also displayed

[60] For a comparison to nationalism in the American republic, see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). He argues that public political festivals in combination with print culture played a key role in forging American nationalism.

[61] Andrew Denson, "Muskogee's Indian International Fairs: Tribal Autonomy and the Indian Image in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Western Historical Quarterly* 34 (Autumn 2003): 326.

examples of Indian "progress" – Christian conversion, agricultural advancement, and educational attainments – right alongside the one-dimensional and stereotypical depictions of Native culture.[62] Although Euro-Americans propped up the so-called "Five Civilized Tribes" as examples of successful assimilation, the citizens of these Indian Nations rejected this caricature. As historian Andrew Denson suggests, leaders of these various indigenous nations "labored to make the fair serve their paramount political goal, the maintenance of the territory as a collection of in dependent Indian nations."[63] They did so by demonstrating their capability for self-government, economic development, and social advances.

In pursuit of these goals, Creeks took advantage of the fairs to present an Education Exhibit. As an announcement in the *Indian Journal* explained, "The opportunity is now offered to send a correct knowledge of the education advancement of the tribes occupying this Territory, not only to the people of the United States, but to the people of the whole world."[64] Creeks, however, did not flaunt their "education advancement" with demonstrations of knowledge in English, or Greek and Latin, which many students knew. Instead, they put their intellect on display in their own language. Students from the boarding schools orally presented original compositions in Muskogee in front of large crowds. Moreover, the subjects of their work reflect a clear commitment to preserving traditions and displaying them for non-Creeks. For instance, Casper Burgess, a Tullahassee student, delivered a piece titled "Ball Play." Yet

[62] Frederick Hoxie, *The Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 88.

[63] Denson,"Muskogee's Indian International Fairs," 326.

[64] W.S. Squier, "Educational," *Indian Journal,* August 24, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

another, Barny Scott, presented "A History of the Creeks."[65] These public demonstrations displayed the dynamic ability of Creeks to utilize oral and written culture to their advantage. They also sent a clear political message to Euro-American observers who threatened their continued existence. They did not do so to meet the whims of Euro-American contemporaries. Instead, they articulated a powerful argument against assimilation into the American nation-state.

Another influential demonstration of Creeks' "education advancement" and the strength of Creek national identity came in the form of students who travelled outside of the nation to continue their education. These students' previous experiences in the Creek boarding schools, the adaptive nature of their cultural practices, and their persistent political identity as citizens of the Creek Nation highlight the failures of assimilation policy, as well as the success of the Creek nation-building agenda. These students challenged Euro-American conceptions of Native Americans as racially and intellectually inferior. Simultaneously, they rejected the idea that they were simply examples of the potential for Native Americans' capability to shed their indigenous cultural identities and become Americans. By flaunting the "civilization" and "progress" of their nation while refusing to accept assimilation, students worked to dismantle stereotypes projected on to them by Euro-American classmates, teachers, and policy makers.

The "Youth in States" program, in particular, served as a point of national pride. Leaders intended this program to produce a new generation of college-educated Creek citizens who would excel in education, business, and politics and who would in turn

[65] "Education at the Fair," *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation), Nov. 2, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

work to advance and protect the nation against further American colonial policies.[66] As Pleasant Porter maintained, "one Indian educated in the States is equal in influence towards progress to an entire public school."[67] Likewise, John Haynes who served as the Chairman of the Committee on Education, recognized that sending Creek students to institutes of higher learning in the states would "afford greater advantages of recognizing a knowledge of the English language."[68] In 1876, the Creek Council, which had already provided support to some students for higher education, codified the program. It then annually sponsored male and female students to attend universities throughout the U.S. By the close of the first official year, the Creek Nation supported thirty scholars in various universities. Twenty-five young men attended Wooster University and Central College in Ohio, Henderson College, and Nashville College in Tennessee, and Howard College in Alabama. Five female students attended colleges in Arkansas, Missouri, and Alabama.[69]

"Youth-in-the-States" was a nationally subsidized system designed to provide citizens with higher education. In 1877, a year after the program started, the Committee on Education recommended to the council that an additional $1,000 of the national budget surplus be added to the $3,500 already supporting the program. They successfully argued to the legislature that the opportunity to expand the program

[66] The most thorough study of the Creek program for higher education to date is by Mvskoke scholar Myra Alexander-Star. See Myra Alexandra-Starr, "Youth-in-the-States: The Mvskoke Indian Nation's Nineteenth Century Higher Education Program," (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2000), 24.

[67] W.O. Tuggle, *Shem, Ham, and Japheth: The Papers of W.O. Tuggle Comprising His Indian Diary, Sketches, and Observations, Myths & Washington Journal in the Territory & At the Capital, 1879-1882*, ed. Eugene Current-Garcia and Dorothy B. Hatfield (Athens: University of Georgia, 1973), 66.

[68] John Haynes, Chairman of the Committee on Education, to Hon. House of Kings and Warriors, October 4, 1877, CNR, roll 49, slide 38455.

[69] *Indian Journal* (Eufaula, Creek Nation), March 15, 1877, microcopy, OHS

marked a "great National moment."[70] The management of the "Youth in States" program was placed in the hands of George Washington Grayson, who oversaw the disbursement of the students' scholarship funds and received reports on their academic progress.[71] Other leading politicians took great interest in supporting the scholars. While he served as Principal Chief, Ward Coachmen even visited Henderson College in Tennessee to "much encourage the young men."[72]

The *Indian Journal* ran updates on the students attending universities, emphasizing their importance to the national agenda. One read, "There are thirty young men and maidens, Creek Indians now in the States attending a higher grade of schools than we have in the Territory…If not civilized now, we are determined to be."[73] Students also regularly sent back reports of their performances to share with the public. For instance, B.E. Porter, a student at University of Wooster, informed readers, "We are progressing nicely in school, this is a week of trial with the students, we are having a grand examination."[74] The editors of the *Indian Journal* printed their reply imploring Porter to "Send the account of the Examination, and standing to The Journal. The whole Creek Nation is interested."[75] The newspaper equated the academic success of the college students with national success.

In turn, the scholars encouraged their fellow citizens to continue to make schools a matter of national importance. So too did the *Indian Journal* play a critical

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[70] Committee on Education to the Creek Council, Creek Nation Records, microfilm roll 49, slide 38456.

[71] Ward Coachman to George Washington Grayson, October 30, 1878, CNR, roll 49, slide 38467.

[72] G.M. Savage to Ward Coachman, May 1, 1877, box 1, folder 4, Ward Coachman Collection, WHC.

[73] *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation), April 5, 1877, microcopy, OHS.

[74] B.E. Porter, "Correspondence," *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation), April 5, 1877, microcopy, OHS.

[75] *Indian Journal* (Muskogee, Creek Nation), Nov. 2, 1876, microcopy, OHS.

role in transmitting this to the public by printing messages from the students. In one telling statement, P. Grayson, who attended Howard College in Alabama, addressed his nation: "Avail yourselves of the many advantages now offered you. We should strive to advance the cause of education among ourselves, and the rising generation, by every just means within our power." He stressed the importance of education and intellectual development to national progress, stating, "A portion of the Indians have been able to attain a high degree of civilization. A civilization which implies Intellectual culture, and an ability to render the forces of nature subservient to human events, and conveniences." Grayson further sought to inspire his fellow countrymen: "Raise your banner high, and inscribe on it as your motto, in letters living light 'Labor ominia vincet.'"[76] His impassioned argument in favor of Creek education illustrates the clear connection he felt to his nation, despite being geographically distant from it.

Students also maintained close ties with friends and family back home, which served as an antidote for homesickness and cultural isolation. Regular correspondence allowed students hundreds of miles from home to remain tied to their communities. Their letters commonly described academic progress, new friendships, relations with white teachers and peers, and eagerness for news from home. Richard Bruner, for instance, wrote home to describe his rigorous examinations at the University of Wooster: "Today we had a examination on Latin, Tomorrow, we have not anything to do, Wednesday we well have examination in English, and the next day Geography. It was very hard examination for today, but I think we pass that Latin." He also described their professor: "He is a good Gentleman, he loves the Indian boys as much as he loves

[76] P. Grayson "Letter to the Editor," *Indian Journal* (Eufaula, Creek Nation), July 12, 1877, microcopy, OHS.

the white boys, may be he loves us more," after he had showed particular kindness to Bruner and his fellow Creek students. Bruner and the other students boarded together, which provided a measure of comfort so far from home. As serious students, however, they knew that it was their responsibility to speak and write English to the best of their abilities, and they actually were concerned that spending so much time together would interfere with their ability to do so. Nevertheless, their group mentality seemingly eased the isolation and homesickness of the students.[77]

Despite the fact that they attended universities in the states to improve their English, students often preferred to write in their native language. W.A. Palmer did just that in a letter he wrote from college in Jackson, Tennessee, to his former teacher and mentor Ann Eliza Robertson. After reporting, "I am doing well and attending my studies," he wrote, "I would very much like to see some Indians. I like to talk in my Indian language." Indicating his desire to stay connected, he implored Robertson for news and materials: "Mrs. Robertson, at this time, if you have any Creek Hymn Books on hand, I would like you to send me one…Please send me news of all Indian activities going on there."[78] In their correspondence, Palmer, Bruner, and others commonly used

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[77] Richard Bruner to W.S. Robertson, May 20, 1880, series 2, box 17, folder 10, AMRC.

[78] Although excerpts of letter appear in English in the text for the benefit of the reader, it is significant that Palmer and other students regularly wrote home, even to English literate friends, in the Muskogee language. To reinforce the author's intent and approach, the original letter written in the Muskogee, is provided below. W. A. Palmer letter to A. E. W. Robertson, May 8, 1880, series 1, box 7, folder 20, AMR. The English translation is courtesy of the Pum Mvhayv Toyetskat: Creek Letters to Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson, 1878-1905, trans. by Margaret McKane Mauldin, ed. by Jack B. Martin, College of William & Mary Linguistics Department, accessed May, 6, 2015, http://lingspace.wm.edu/lingspace/creek/texts/aewr/:

Jackson, Tenn., May 8, 80.

Mrs. Robertson, Dear Friend:Toyetskat cokv cenhecayankes ce. Momis vmetektankon hiyomat oren mucv nettvn ametektanken cokv cemvtotayet os ce; momet estonkon cvfencvke aleket apokacekaconken kerayat esacafacke heret omak's ce, momet cokv hecaleke vnhessaleke omvlekvt estonkon fulacoken pohayat acafacket omk's ce. Momet hiyomat vneton omat estonkon cvcvfeken heret cokv hecepit arepayet omes, momen cokv hecaleke apvlewv omvlekat cvfencvke aleket etefulet omes ce, momet yamv ton omat enokketv semahekon este estonkon heren fulet omes ce. Momen hiyomat

"Indian" to describe their language, customs, and themselves as distinct from the whites they encountered.

Letters and other writings also suggest that the Creek students' Euro-American teachers and peers tended to expect them to perform as Natives based on racial stereotypes. Students' accounts indicate they experienced racial self-consciousness as a result. Palmer suggested this when he wrote, "The white people want me to sing for them," explaining that he would need to do so in the Muskogee language. Another student recalled that her teacher assigned her to give a paper on Indian Territory and sing an Indian song. She "protested to no avail" and requested that she sing a Christian hymn in Muskogee. Her teacher rejected the idea saying, "don't you know any songs that are real Indian not connected with the English language at all"; so she selected a Muskogee medicine song instead. She also had to write home to friends to request they send her a pair of moccasins and large hoop earrings, which she paired with a beaded headband and blanket as her costume. The song was such a hit that her teacher asked to do repeat performances for local audiences.[79] These expectations of indigenous

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vnetalkuset likit cokv hecit arayet omes, este cataleke omvlekvt ehuten apeyepen vnetalkuset likit okis; monkv este cate hecetv cayacet omes, este cate en^ponvkvn opunvyetvn cayacet omkv; momis vnetalkuset omes estonkon heren anep arepayet omes ce. We are all going have examination the 3d, of June, and also we going have both written and oral examination. Now, I am try to get ready to examination. Momis hiyomat yamv ton omat emoren hiyet omen cokv aketecetv heremahekot omes ce, monkv cokv hecaleke ton omat enhorake here omet etefulet omes ce. Momet cemetakewe estofvne examination, ocaranaceken omat heretv cayacet omes ce, momet essickv nettv ocacekvt hecetv cayacet omes, momis hiyomat ametektanket hecako tayet omes ce. Mrs. Robertson, hiyomat Creek Hymn Book, ocecken omat hvmken avnetotecekares cayacet omes ce, este hatehaleket yihekaren eyacet oman esyihiketvn ocakot omet okis ce. Momet hiyomat este cataleken naken estomet fulen omat amonayecekares ce. Hiyomat opunvkv sulken cemvtotetv cayacet omes, momis hiyomat ametektanke sekot omen opunvkv koconosen cemvtotite omes ce. Momet heyv cokv estofvn vnheceken omat lapken cokv avnetotecekares, monkv opunvkv momusen wikes ce. From your truly, W. A. Palmer

[79] "Memory Lane," Lilah D. Lindsey Collection, series 1, box 1, folder 9, McFarlin Library Special Collections, Tulsa, OK (hereafter MLSP), 59-61.

behavior often made students uncomfortable since they already considered themselves "real" Indians.[80]

Even among those who struggled to fit in with Euro-American peers, the students who attended colleges in the U.S. understood the opportunity that their nation had provided them and felt all the more tied to their Creek identity. This drove them to want to serve their nation to the best of their abilities, though attending school so far from home no doubt posed challenges.[81] Though they attended school in an era when assimilationists intended education to erase Native identities, they went to college at the behest of their own communities. As a result, they maintained considerable ties to their nation and felt a great sense of responsibility to serve it.

Albert Pike McKellop (A.P.), who was among the first class of "Youth-in-the-States" students, consistently expressed a desire to aid his nation. He enrolled at the University of Wooster in Ohio after attending Tullahassee Manual Labor School in the early 1870s.[82] At Wooster, McKellop quickly excelled in his studies, became the top Latin scholar, and advanced to the top his class. He also mentored other Creek students who followed in subsequent years. While there, McKellop stayed in touch with friends and family from home and kept up to date on local news. David L. Payne's Boomer Movement dominated headlines at the time. The heightened attempts at territorializing

[80] See Phillip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004), 4-11 for more cultural expectations of indigenous behavior.

[81] In their collection of first person narratives of Native American college students in the twentieth century, editors Andrew Garrod and Robert Kilkenny describe their collective experience by saying that "Though they had little control over the form and content of their college education, they could decide what significance it was going to hold for them and their communities. For these young people, education no longer represented a one-for-one replacement of tribal identity with mainstream identity, but rather an opportunity to ensure Native American cultural survival." See Andrew Garrod and Colleen Larimore, eds., *First Person, First Peoples: Native American College Graduates Tell Their Life Stories* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1997), 16.

[82] McKellop was born near town of Choska. His father was Scottish and his mother was Creek.

Indian Territory seriously alarmed McKellop. Despite his academic success, these threats against his nation made him rethink his decision to study ministry.[83]

McKellop wrote to his former teacher informing him of his decision to leave the ministry: "'When I first came here to school my intention was to study for the ministry but after a careful consideration of the real needs of our people, I have changed my mind. It seems plain to me that we must first secure for our people a country where they can live in peace and comfort… I have decided to spend my life as a politician and statesman defending the sacred right of our people.'"[84] McKellop returned to his nation and achieved his goal. Over the next two decades, he proceeded to serve in a variety of different elected and appointed government positions, including as a member of the board of examiners of public instruction, a clerk for the House of Warriors, an elected representative in the House of Kings, and a Creek delegate to Washington D.C.[85]

Lilah Denton, another early "Youth-in-the-States" student, also showed a great sense of duty to her nation, but her role was more confined by gender. Rather than striving to be a politician like McKellop, she sought to serve as an educator in the Creek schools. After her birth in 1860, life as a war refugee at Ft. Gibson and the death of her father during the conflict characterized her early childhood. When she reached the age of twelve, she began attending Tullahassee but had to leave the school when her mother became ill with tuberculosis and died. While away, she experienced "a haunting desire for a finished education and to be useful to my people."[86] Denton remained in contact

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[83] Starr, "Youth-in-the-States," 174.

[84] Quoted in Starr, "Youth-in-the-States," 174.

[85] Deposition of A.P. McKellop, Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with the Affairs in the Indian Territory, Senate Reports, 59th Congress, 2nd Session, 1904.

[86] Lilah was the daughter of John (Cherokee and Scottish) and Susan McKellop Denton (Creek), and she was born on October 21, 1860, in Indian Territory (I.T.). Lilah Denton Lindsey, "Memory [Lane] of Other Days, or November 12th, 1939," series 1, box 1, folder 8, Lilah D. Lindsey Papers, MLSP.

with her former teachers and hoped that she would have the opportunity to attend college and fulfill her lifelong dream of teaching in the schools. She even rejected her future husband's initial proposal, telling him "I have no idea of marrying your or anyone else now. I am planning to get a finished education and teach school. That is my ambition and I am not going to be derailed from my plan. I am going 'off to the states' to get an education and do missionary work among my people."[87]

Denton finally received her chance when an opening became available at the Synodical Female College in Fulton, Missouri, in 1880. Although she lived and worked, in her words, as "an Indian maid gathering her pale faced sisters about her," she strove to make herself "fit for work among her own people, the Creek Indians."[88] She attended the school for one year and then at the request of a former Tullahassee teacher who taught in Ohio, Denton transferred to Highland Institute in Hillsboro. There, she excelled in her studies, winning "best in scholarship" in all of her classes, and in 1883, she became the first Creek woman to receive a college degree.[89] Since so few women received college degrees during this period, her degree read "Mistress of Liberal Arts," instead of the "Bachelors" degree awarded to male graduates. Her achievement was hailed as a triumph for the Creek Nation and garnered her lifelong recognition as an educator and intellectual.

Denton immediately returned home and began teaching in the Wealeka National School. She did eventually marry her suitor, a contractor named Lee W. Lindsey, in 1885, but this did not stop her from pursuing her career. She taught at the Okmulgee

[87] "Memory [Lane] of Other Days, or November 12th, 1939," series 1, box 1, folder 8, Lilah D. Lindsey Papers, MLSP.

[88] "Sketch of My Life," Lilah D. Lindsey Papers, series 1, box 1, folder 1, MLSP.

[89] "Sketch of My Life," Lilah D. Lindsey Papers, series 1, box 1, folder 1, MLSP.

school for a while before moving to the Presbyterian mission in Tulsa from 1886 to 1889. Then she returned to Wealaka from 1890 to 1894, before finally settling back in Tulsa, where she continued teaching. She also fostered several children to ensure that they received an education. Throughout her lifetime, Denton not only benefited from the Creek national school system but also strove to contribute to her nation by educating its citizens. Her work did not go unappreciated, as demonstrated by the hundreds of notes of appreciation she received from former students, parents, and community leaders.[90]

Denton's education at an American university and her subsequent career did not interfere with her self-identification as a Creek woman. Later in life, she drew on her experiences, serving as a civic leader to "quietly and unostentatiously administered to the needs of the poor, sick, and destitute."[91] She became involved in a number of Progressive Era causes, including prohibition, women's suffrage, conservation, and healthcare reform. She also took on leading roles in a number of reform organizations, including the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Ladies Aid Society, the Women's Relief Corp and the Indian Women's Club. At the invitation of Theodore Roosevelt, Denton even travelled to the White House to attend events for her reform efforts on four separate occasions.[92] Native American assimilation, however, was not a Progressive Era ideology that she embraced.

[90] "November 19, 1942 clipping from *The Women's Tribume*," Lilah Lindsey Papers, series 6, box 1, folder 1, MLSP.

[91] "Sketch of My Life," Lilah D. Lindsey Papers, series 1, box 1, folder 1, MLSC.

[92] "Handwritten fragment," series 1, box 1, folder 6, Lilah Lindsey Papers, MLSC.

Instead, Denton considered it her lifelong duty to instill "sound Christian citizenship for the safety of the Nation."[93] She could easily be mistaken for the quintessential assimilation success story and often was by her Euro-American contemporaries. Nevertheless, as was the goal of the "Youth-in-the-States" program, she made it her mission to work towards the benefit and continued survival of her people. In fact, because of her work to preserve the Muskogee language and Creek customs, she was widely considered an "authority on tribal rites."[94] For instance, in one interview for a local paper, she explained that if the Green Corn Ceremony and other dances ceased it would be "tragic" and "mark the end of one chapter in the red man's history."[95] Though education profoundly shaped her life, Lindsey seamlessly wove together her formal schooling, Christianity, and reform efforts into her identity as a Creek woman.

In addition to the "Youth-in-the-States" scholars, another group of Creek students demonstrated their continued indigenous self-identification even in the face of the most coercive of assimilation policies, federal boarding school education. In 1881, at the height of the boarding school era, a group of twenty-five students travelled under the care of Alice Mary Robertson, the daughter of Ann Eliza and William Robertson, to attend Richard Pratt's Carlisle Indian School. The decision was not an easy one as even Robertson, who worked at Carlisle at this time, expressed doubts stating, "I did not

[93] "Memory [Lane] of Other Days, or November 12th, 1939," series 1, box 1, folder 8, Lilah D. Lindsey Papers, MLSC.

[94] "Memory [Lane] of Other Days, or November 12th, 1939," series 1, box 1, folder 8, Lilah D. Lindsey Papers, MLSC.

[95] "Newspaper Clipping," series 6, box 1, folder 1, Lilah D. Lindsey Papers, MLSC; Also see series 4, box 1, folder 13 and series 4, box 1, folder 31 in the Lilah Lindsey Papers for Lindsey's detailed writings on Creek ceremonies.

think this would be a good place for our Creek children to come."[96] Nevertheless, in response to an emergency, some parents consented for their children to travel to Pennsylvania under her guardianship.

Before departing, the students previously attended Tullahassee Manual Labor School. After a fire destroyed the main school building on December 19, 1880, the future of the school, a central Creek institution for three decades, suddenly came under question. Thus, sending the students to Carlisle did not represent an endorsement of the assimilation policy. Instead, the situation arose as a temporary solution to a particular set of circumstances. The council decided to close Tullahassee, leaving its students temporarily without a means of education. The decision led to sudden hostility between Creek politicians and the Robertson family. After William died a few months later, Ann Eliza and her children even suggested that closing the school had sent him to his grave. Robertson and her children continued their "bitter opposition" and hoped to circumvent the council to continue their own school, threatening decades of good relations with the government.[97] When they appealed to the ABCFM to interfere, they received an immediate reprimand: "All this action takes into view 1st. the right of the Creek authorities to control their property; and 2d. the full understanding that our Missionary will not encourage a rival school to the one established by them." [98] Missionaries did not dictate the terms of education in the Creek Nation; the Creek Council did. With her family thoroughly admonished, Alice Robertson learned she had

[96] Alice Robertson to Ann August Robertson Moore, Nov, 12, 1880, series 2, box 10, folder 5, AMRC.

[97] Robert Loughridge to A.E.W. Robertson, Dec. 1, 1882, series 2, box 12, folder 11, AMRC.

[98] John C. Lowrie to A.E.W. Robertson and Ann Augusta Craig, Oct. 11, 1881, series 2, box 12, folder 12, AMRC.

to yield to the council's wishes if she wished to continue to serve the Creeks and stay in their good graces.

Creek freedmen representatives pressured their government to open a permanent freedmen boarding school since the council discontinued the temporary one at the Old Union Agency. In response, the council designated Tullahassee as the site of a new "colored" boarding school. The council also responded to complaints of politically conservative Creeks who argued the boarding schools were elitist institutions. Officials appropriated funds to build and support a new boarding school, Wealaka Mission, in a more isolated and conservative portion of the nation on the Arkansas River where there was a high demand to provide expand educational opportunities for children.[99] Some of the former Tullahassee students transferred to Wealaka once it opened, but in the meantime, others sought out alternatives. Under the care of Alice Robertson, the parents of these pupils elected to send them to Carlisle Indian School so that they would continue their studies.

The Creek students who attended Carlisle did so under very different circumstances than the majority of other federal boarding school pupils. They went voluntarily with the consent of their parents and their government to ensure that they continued their education after the Tullahassee fire. Whereas many other Carlisle students suffered trauma upon their abrupt removal from their families, communities, and tribal practices, Creek students already spoke English, used English names, and dressed like their Euro-American contemporaries. Moreover, the expectations of the

[99] "On the day of the opening for 80 students, a large company of Indians gathered with 200 children pleading for admission," series 4, box 1, folder 27, Lilah Lindsey Papers, MLSC.

school were not as foreign to Creek students since they previously attended an academically rigorous institution.[100]

This did not mean, however, that the Creek students embraced the harsh military style-discipline, the vocational curriculum, or the overarching assimilationist goals of Carlisle. Individuals reported homesickness and sadness after they arrived at their destination. Fourteen year old Ben Marshall, for instance, wrote to his former teacher: "When we was on our way we was very happy but after we got here we were not merry but just the other way, nearly all of us cried because we were homesick, but now we are getting all right."[101] He and the others, including fourteen-year-old Alexander McNac and fourteen-year-old Samuel Scott, seemed determined to make the most of their situation and take advantage of the continued school opportunities provided for them.[102] Marshall explained, "When we came there was many of us cried. I won't be ashamed to tell that I cried because I now [sic] I was not the only one that cried, but we are getting all right now and I hope we will feel better and go to work and make some body of ourselves," Marshall explained.[103] Likewise, his classmate Ellis Childers wrote to Alice Robertson to thank her for her work, "We Creek boys were talking together & we felt very thankful that we had a friend that would do so much for us." He made clear that the opportunity to attend school encouraged him: "It made me desire to do the best I can in all my ways. And I believe it was the same with nearly all the Creek boys that

[100] For more on Carlisle Indian School see Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield & Classroom: An Autobiography by Richard Henry Pratt*, ed. Robert M. Utley (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004) and Hayes Peters, *The Art of Americanization at Carlisle Indian School* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011).

[101] Ben Marshall to W.S. Robertson, Jan. 27, 1881, series 2, box 12, folder 13, AMRC.

[102] RG 75, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Carlisle Indian Industrial School Student Records, 1879-1918, series1327, folder 607, folder 611, folder 610, National Archives, D.C.

[103] Ben Marshall to A.E.W. Robertson, Jan. 27, 1881, series 2, box 12, folder 13, AMRC.

heard it if not all."[104] Despite the emotional strain of traveling so far from their homes, parents, and Tullahassee, the importance of education instilled in them from a young age profoundly shaped their experiences.

Subsequently, the Creek students at Carlisle during the early 1880s often wrote positively concerning the value of education. The students' accounts offer a stark contrast from many negative portrayals of boarding school experiences. Creek perspectives, however, must be properly contextualized to understand students' particular responses. For instance, an article by Ellis Childers published in the Carlisle school newspaper has been frequently cited as a positive endorsement of assimilation policy and federal boarding school education. He wrote the article after a delegation of educated Native Americans visited Carlisle to speak to the students. One encouraged the children to take advantage of their situation saying, "You must try to learn and when you come back home your people will be glad to see you and what you learn will be a benefit to them." The interpreter for the speakers also told the students, "We can learn as well as our friends, the whites. We can do just as well as the white people. If we try."[105] This message resonated with Childers. He responded positively because the speakers' echoed what he had already heard from his own family, teachers, and national leaders back home. Education had been an important part of his community now for multiple generations and he was intimately familiar with its significance long before he arrived at Carlisle.

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[104] E.B. Childers to Alice Robertson, May 5, 1883, series 2, box 1, folder 13, AMRC.

[105] Ellis B. Childers, "Responsive and Resistant Students," part 1, School News, (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.) vol. 2, no. 11 (April 1882). Reprinted in Peter Nabokov, ed., *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492–1992* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), 218–220 and available online under the title "All That Is Passed Away": A Young Indian Praises U.S. Government Policy in the Late 19th Century at http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/37/.

In fact, letters home from Childers and the other students during their time in Pennsylvania demonstrate persistent ties to the Creek Nation, rather than an erosion of indigenous identity. Although these students were younger than the "Youth-in-the-States" scholars were, their sense of duty to their nation was the same. Ben Marshall frequently mentioned this in his correspondence: "I hope all of us will live to go back to our country and when let us go back with what we learn…we must put it to use…When we go back we will be like a person that have had some schooling, and be an honor to our country." In another instance, he wrote similarly, "I am going to try with all my mite [sic] to get an education, and if life last I will go back and be a help to my people and an honor to my country."[106] Childers expressed the same sentiments. Even after spending over two years at Carlisle and travelling to New York, he wrote he liked Brooklyn better than any place except home: "It's my native country and my people are there, and some day I must go back and be of use to them."[107] Pratt, of course, feared that students returning home would slide back into "savagery"; they would "find all the surroundings and influences against them."[108] Despite Carlisle's role as the linchpin for assimilation, it ultimately failed. Diverse students from many different tribal affiliations resisted, adapted, and used the institution to serve their own needs. So too, did the twenty-five Creek students who attended Carlisle for approximately three years after their own national school burned down.

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[106] Ben Marshall to Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson, Jan. 27, 1881, series 2, box 12, folder 13, AMRC.

[107] E.B. Childers to Alice Robertson, May 5, 1883, series 2, box 1, folder 13, AMRC.

[108] *Annual Address to the Public of the Lake Mohonk Conference, Volume 2* (Philadelphia: Executive Committee of the Indian Rights Association, 1884), 27.

Creek students and the general population of the nation posed a clear challenge to the assimilation campaign, Euro-American conceptions of "civilization," and the dominant racial ideologies in the late nineteenth century U.S. So-called "Friends of the Indians" who gathered to discuss the "Indian Question" at the Lake Mohonk Conference each year whether or not education could potentially lift indigenous populations from "savagery" to "civilization."[109] Creeks and other members of the Native nations in Indian Territory, however, did not seem to fit within the simple "before and after" of the "savagery vs. civilization" dichotomy as it was conceptualized by Euro-Americans. Many spoke English, practiced Christianity, had high educational attainments, and participated in a republican form of government. For decades, white Americans had even referred to them as the "Five Civilized Tribes," clearly drawing a distinction between them and other Native groups. Creeks and the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws implemented Euro-American practices into their preexisting worldviews and customs, rather than replacing one for the other. Moreover, they did so to protect their sovereign nations rather than assimilating into the American nation-state. This strategy, however, did not quell Euro-American settler colonialist policies aimed at dispossessing them of their land and dissolving their sovereignty.

As the nineteenth century progressed, solutions to the "Indian Question" became shrouded in the ideology of scientific racism, which posited that Native Americans "savagery" was an inherent quality of the Indian race, making them biologically inferior

[109] Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 31-37.

to the Anglo-Saxon race.[110] The fact that Creeks attended Native controlled public school systems that rivalled those in neighboring states, demonstrated high academic achievements, excelled and often outperformed white students at Euro-American universities, and successfully pursued lucrative careers as educators, politicians, entrepreneurs and intellectuals did not fit within Euro-American "expectations" of indigenous behavior. Instead, these attainments seemed "anomalous" to Euro-American contemporaries in search of "real" Indians, despite the fact that the Creeks, Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws achieved them in large numbers. [111]

What "Friends of the Indians," policymakers, and the Euro-American public more broadly failed to recognize is that by the late nineteenth century "real" Indians did in fact have thriving public school systems, flourishing print cultures, and intellectual traditions that they had woven into preexisting worldviews and practices. Overlapping uses of oral and print culture, public ceremonies, and the schools themselves had become central components of Creek national identity by this period. While students frequently put these features of their culture on display and politicians used them to send a powerful message concerning their capacity for self-government and social advancement, Euro-American often ignored or, worse, twisted Creeks' efforts to justify further colonial policies. Even then, the greatest threat to Creek national survival did not stem from the federal boarding school system, reformers who gathered in New York, or policymakers in Washington D.C. Nor did it stem from cultural erosion or the adaptive use of Euro-American practices on the part of Creeks. Rather, the growing

[110] Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club,* 31-37. Also see Hoxie, *A Final Promise* for more on this transition in racial ideology and its effects on assimilation policy.

[111] Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*, 4-11.

number of Euro-American and African American squatters entering their nation and demanding a share of their resources posed the greatest threat to the Creek Nation during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SCHOOLS, SETTLERS, AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE ALLOTMENT ERA

Creek citizens found their education system to be a major topic of discussion in the United States in 1898. On December 5, President William McKinley even broached the matter in his State of the Union address. Despite a number of pressing concerns, including contention over the Spanish-American War and calls for progressive reforms, McKinley devoted time to a situation that had been developing in and around Creek country. He emphasized the need to use federal power specifically to educate the white population of Indian Territory. "I can not too strongly indorse the recommendation of the commission and of the Secretary of the Interior for the necessity of providing for the education of the 30,000 white children resident in the Indian Territory," the president proclaimed.[1] This call to action came in response to a perceived educational crisis that had developed over the past two decades.

During the 1880s and 1890s, settlers strongly reacted against the sovereign Native nations who wielded authority in the region and demanded action from the federal government. In his history of American settler colonialism, historian Walter Hixson explains, "Following on the heels of Manifest Destiny, visions of a powerful, modernizing continental empire left no cultural space and only the assigned physical spaces of reservations for Indians." In the case of Indian Territory, the settlers on the ground, more so than policymakers in Washington D.C., drove this process as they

[1] William McKinley, State of the Union Address, December 5, 1898, George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 28, 2003, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29539> (accessed August 24, 2015).

"often took the 'Indian problem' into their own hands"[2] In turn, Congress shaped new policies designed to devastate indigenous sovereignty and bring the territory under the jurisdiction of the federal government.[3]

Indian Territory served as the site of the ultimate contest between American sovereignty and indigenous sovereignty as the U.S. and Native nations pursued competing projects of nation-building. Subsequently, numerous disputes emerged over access to land and resources, legal jurisdiction, racial marginalization, socioeconomic divisions, and political sovereignty, resulting in what Angie Debo characterized as "an orgy of plunder and exploitation probably unparalleled in American history."[4] Following Debo's example, several historians have examined these issues in their analyses of the allotment era.[5] The desire to exploit land and resources and to subordinate Native peoples no doubt drove the colonial policies leading to Oklahoma statehood. Nevertheless, education in the region also served as a major point of contention during this period. Educational opportunity played a prominent role in the political discourse of the day, yet it is largely missing from the larger narratives of U.S.-Native relations in Indian Territory during this period.

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[2] Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New Palgrave Mcmillan, 2013), 113.

[3] As Lisa Ford explains in her comparative study of settler sovereignty in Georgia and New South Wales, "the obliteration of indigenous jurisdiction became the litmus test of settler statehood." Squatters in Indian Territory strongly reacted against the jurisdiction of the Native nations and successfully drove policy makers to dissolve their legal sovereignty. *Settler Sovereignty: Jurisdiction and Indigenous People in America and Australia, 1788-1836* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, reprint edition, 2011), 2.

[4] Angie Debo, *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, reprint edition, 1973), 91.

[5] See Murray R. Wickett, *Contested Territory: Whites, Native Americans, and African Americans in Oklahoma 1865-1907* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2000); David Chang, *The Color of Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Rose Stremlau, *Sustaining the Cherokee Family: Kinship and the Allotment of an Indigenous Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

This chapter examines education in the Creek Nation and Indian Territory more broadly during the 1880s and 1890s from three intersecting perspectives: Creeks and other Native peoples struggling to control their national institutions, settlers agitating for access to schools, and federal officials determined to dissolve Native sovereignty. First, Creeks continued to reform and expand their national schools despite internal struggles and external pressures. While advantaging Creek students, they excluded non-citizens, leaving an increasing number of Euro-American and African American families desperate for alternatives. Second, by the 1890s, the power dynamics in Indian Territory began to shift as settlers colonized the area. They argued that their lack of educational opportunities threatened the entire American republic. As such, many demanded that Congress prioritize schooling for Euro-Americans over Native Americans and African Americans. Finally, this argument resonated with policymakers already intent on implementing allotment policies in Indian Territory, opening the area for settlement, and assimilating the Native population. This ultimately resulted in the 1898 Curtis Act. Although this legislation promised to pull white settlers out of a state of ignorance, the poorly planned policies only heightened Euro-Americans' demands for educational privilege and triggered devastating effects for the Creek Nation and other Native peoples.

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Creek leaders worked to expand their national school system to serve the welfare of citizens in the post-Civil War era. An opportunity for large-scale educational reform arose in 1889, when the Creek and Seminole nations agreed to sell 3,000,000 acres of unoccupied land to the federal government to be opened for settlement under

homestead laws.[6] In exchange for the land, the Creek Nation received $80,057.10 in immediate funds and an additional $2,000,000 to be held in trust and disbursed to "support their government, the maintenance of schools and educational establishments, and such other objects that may be designed to promote the welfare and happiness of the people." The Creek delegates at the treaty negotiations—Pleasant Porter, David M. Hodge, and Isparhecher, all strong advocates of the national school system—agreed that a substantial amount of these funds would go towards furthering the education of Creek children. They stipulated that "not less than fifty thousand dollars annually" would support the "establishment and maintenance of schools" and of that fund "at least ten thousand dollars shall go to the education of orphan children."[7] Subsequently, the national school fund increased from $46,000 in 1887 to $76,480.40 in 1891. This fund paid for the salaries of teachers and superintendents, construction and maintenance of buildings, school supplies, textbooks, and other related costs.[8] With this new capital, the Creek Council initiated dramatic reform efforts to expand and modernize the public school system.

Despite the loss of land that facilitated this initiative, the solidification of the schools signified growth and strength rather than destruction for Creeks. This sent a clear message to intruders and federal officials that leaders intended their national institutions to be permanent features in Indian Territory. On October 15, 1891, the Creek Council enacted a new set of school laws that reconfigured the system and reformed government oversight of it. These new laws divided the nation into three

[6] Danney Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma: The Making of a New Kind of State* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 3-12.

[7] "An act to ratify and confirm with the Muskogee Creek Indians in Indian Territory, and other purposes," March 1, 1889, *ARCIA*, 1890, 438-440.

[8] "Report of the Union Agency," September 7, 1891, *ARCIA*, 1892, 250.

school districts, each encompassing two judicial districts. A newly organized Board of Education, consisting of one representative from each district appointed by the principal chief and approved by the Creek Council, held "complete supervision and control of all the schools and the educational interest of the Nation at large." The board's duties included to "adopt rules and regulations" for the schools, "to prescribe and enforce rules for the examination of teachers and for the admission of pupils," "to prescribe and enforce courses of study," "to prescribe and enforce a series of uniform text books," and "to examine all applicants for positions as teachers and grant certificates according to qualifications." The Council also reorganized educational institutions into three categories: primary schools that offered basic education for any Creek citizens between the ages of six and eighteen, intermediate schools that provided manual labor training, and high schools that afforded advanced academic training.[9] Creeks desired progressive education, and these reforms significantly modernized the national schools.

The new school laws and funding also allowed for a considerable expansion of the system, making education even more available to Creek citizens across disparate geographic regions, cultural orientations, and socioeconomic classes. To ensure the public schools served the maximum number of children, the law stipulated that all of these schools were to be "established or located by the Board in the more suitable and convenient places for the majority of the people." The council also announced its intention to expand the number of primary schools to a total of fifty, "apportioned between the Indian and colored citizens in proportion to population." Moreover, it made provisions to open six new high schools throughout the nation, including one in

[9] "Creek School Acts, True Copy, Okmulgee Ind. Terr., October 15th, 1891," in Creek Nation Committee on Education, Minutes. Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter cited as BL).

the Coweta District, one in the Okmulgee District, another near Sapulpa in the Okmulgee District, one in the Deep Fork District, one in the Eufaula District near the site of the Asbury Mission, and one near the site of the Wealaka Mission.[10]

While the board specifically designated these six for the "Indian children," it also made provisions for an additional high school to be located "at the south side of the Arkansas River for the Colored Children." This school was to provide for Afro-Creek citizens who had been lobbying for increased access to higher education for years. The reformed system offered much better funded institutions, qualified educators, and far more opportunities to the Creek population than during the preceding decades.[11]

Perhaps the most drastic education reform put into place by the council concerned the longstanding relationship between the schools and various missionary societies. Creek leaders worked to make the national school system an unquestionably autonomous institution. Despite four decades of tentative cooperation, the council empowered the Board of Education "to notify the several religious boards and societies that it is the purpose and desire of the Creek Nation to disassociate their relations with them that now exists under contract and take the exclusive control of management and maintenance of the schools in the Creek Nation."[12] This sent a clear message to assimilationist missionaries, social reformers, and policymakers that citizens in no way depended on benevolent societies for education.

[10] "Creek School Acts, True Copy, Okmulgee Ind. Terr., October 15th, 1891," in Creek Nation Committee on Education, Minutes. BL.

[11] "Creek School Acts, True Copy, Okmulgee Ind. Terr., October 15th, 1891," in Creek Nation Committee on Education, Minutes. BL.

[12] "Creek School Acts, True Copy, Okmulgee Ind. Terr., October 15th, 1891," in Creek Nation Committee on Education, Minutes. Western Americana Collection, BL.

The new system demonstrated that Creek citizens and their elected officials remained dedicated to maintaining and improving a modern, standardized, public school system. Meanwhile, leaders also made it clear to non-citizens that Creeks intended their education system to be a permanent feature of the socio-political landscape in their territory. They intentionally designed this reinvestment in education to serve the welfare of the nation and to act as a defense against colonial threats. Why, though, would the Creek Nation agree to cede the land and apply the funds to education if they feared for their political survival in the wake of colonization efforts? The reasons for their decision are multifaceted and stemmed from both internal and external factors.

The decades leading up to the land sale marked a period of economic, political, and social struggle for the Creeks. During the 1870s, the nation had accumulated an outstanding debt, largely due to increased funding for the education system. As Angie Debo argues, "Although this growing education program was essential to the welfare of the Creeks, it was beyond their financial capacity."[13] In 1879, Creeks elected former Principal Chief Samuel Checote to a third term by a slim margin. He entered office with hopes of decreasing the national debt, but the fire at Tullahassee Mission in 1880 marked a further significant financial loss to the nation. Checote looked for alternative ways to increase the national budget. Though Creeks had long been resistant to recognizing Seminole claims over a tract of 175,000 acres along their nations' border, Checote and his followers reluctantly entertained the idea of selling the land to prevent the U.S. from claiming it without any compensation. The Creek Nation did garner $175,000 for this cession but it took an ongoing legal struggle. In the summer of 1881,

[13] Angie Debo, *The Road to Disappearance: A History of the Creek Indians* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 250.

a severe drought triggered food shortage and a smallpox epidemic spread across the nation, further exacerbating the situation. To prevent spreading the disease among children, the national schools remained closed for a full quarter. Despite the expansion and democratic school reforms of recent years, the progress of this central institution seemingly came to a halt as Creeks struggled to maintain stability and prosperity.[14]

Meanwhile, long-standing political grievances sparked strife between Checote's backers and their political opponents. For partisan reasons, the Checote administration removed Loyal Party leader Isparhecher from his position as judge. Isparhecher, who had a large number of followers among Loyal Creeks and African Creeks, articulated decades' of grievances over the current constitutional government and the concentration of power in the hands of those with racist and elitist conceptions of Creek nationhood. The agitators formed a rival government to the Creek Council. Checote sent the Lighthorsemen to disband the dissidents, and although they resisted, only a handful of men died in the scuffle. Isparhecher's followers then sought refuge in neighboring nations. In 1883, the opposing political parties negotiated a peace and nearly all of the dissidents received full amnesty. Isparhecher also received a pardon and retained a prominent position in the Creek political arena. The Creeks settled the matter quickly through deliberation and compromise. Nevertheless, the "Creek troubles" or as one official described it, "the regular quadrennial rebellion against the Creek government," provided fodder for federal critics of the Creek Nation's ability to self-govern.[15]

`[14] "Message of Samuel Checote to the National Council," October 30, 1882, Samuel Checote Collection, box 1, folder 8, WHC; Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 251-252.

[15] Chang, *Color of the Land*, 65-69; Debo, *The Road to Disappearance*, 249-284; Jno. Q. Tufts, United States Indian Agent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, *ARCIA*, 1883, 147.

As the Creeks struggled with these instances of internal strife during the 1880s, they also faced mounting external pressure. The process of imperial expansion in the west combined with the continuous decrease in the availability of open land led to pressure to open Indian Territory for settlement. Both policymakers at the federal level and white squatters in Indian Territory pressed for access to Native land and resources. Followers of David Payne's "Boomer" movement demanded Congress open the "unassigned lands" in Indian Territory as they flooded into the region. This land had been set aside in the Reconstruction treaties to be used for Indians and freedmen, not for white settlement. Of course, this was contingent on the federal government upholding a treaty promise. Invoking terms common in settler colonial discourse, Payne called to Americans to "Come and go with us to this beautiful land and secure for yourself and children homes in the richest, most beautiful and best country that the great Creator, in His Goodness, has made for man. To settle upon, occupy, and cultivate is the only cost."[16] Despite this promise, Euro-American settlement in the region did come at a steep cost for the indigenous nations as their future was placed in jeopardy.

The pressure to sell the land mounted and put the Creeks in an impossible position. After they acquiesced, over fifty thousand settlers poured into the area in the first Oklahoma Land Run on April 22, 1889. A year later, Congress passed the Oklahoma Organic Act, which officially organized the recently available land in western Oklahoma into Oklahoma Territory and put in place a territorial government. Oklahoma Territory, however, was meant to be only an intermediate step in the process of dissolving the sovereignty of the Native Americans. Oklahoma and Indian

[16] D.L. Payne, *To Our Oklahoma Colonists,* (Wichita, 1882), Hargrett Collection, Helmerich Center for American Research, GM.

Territories would eventually join to form the state of Oklahoma, leaving the political status of the Native nations unclear.[17]

Drastic demographic shifts within the Creek country also sparked ongoing debates over the future of the Creek Nation. Thousands of Euro-Americans, who had come to Indian Territory seeking labor opportunities in the coal, business, farming, land surveying, and railroad industries, already legally resided in the area with permission from the Creek Council. African Americans who fled to Indian Territory after the Civil War also inhabited the Creek Nation. By the late 1880s, the number of non-Creeks began to increase dramatically which intensified pressure to open Indian Territory. In fact, by 1890 an astounding 3,289 Euro-Americans and 4,621 African Americans resided with 9,999 Creeks within the bounds of the nation. While politicians in Washington, D.C., pushed to open Indian Territory, on the local level settlers agitated for social and political rights in the region.[18] The situation alarmed many Creeks. For instance, D. Robinson explained the clear consequence of opening up their territory for settlement. "The white people would overrun us," he proclaimed. Principal Chief J.M. Perryman explained Creek sentiment to federal commissioners in 1895, "We believe they have no right to be there."[19]

The continued threat of intrusion even made some Creeks question whether or not investing in education had been the right approach to ensure the survival of the their nation. As one concerned observer remarked, "There are many laudible efforts being made within our people to preserve us from destruction. I refer to schools churches and

[17] Danney Goble, *Progressive Oklahoma*, 3-12.
[18] Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 12-13; Chang, *The Color of the Land*, 76.
[19] Testimony of D. Robinson, "Investigation of condition of Indians in Indian Territory, d: pt. 2; "Testimony on industrial, social, moral, and political condition, primarily of five civilized tribes, and condition of freedmen in Indian Territory," 2363 S.rp.1278/4, May 18, 1885, 355.

honest industries." Yet he feared the shift to live "under the form of laws or institutions of advanced civilizations, enforced by direction" was leading to "calamitous suffering." Not only did "death to the Indians" seem imminent, "[f]rom all external views of affairs…the will of the people of the United States will determine the question."[20] The continued colonization of the Creek Nation that its peoples had feared since removal unfolded before them. Nevertheless, leaders responded by doubling down on the education program to make an investment in the future.

While the national school system advanced the interests of Creek citizens, the council simultaneously established laws enforcing tighter restrictions on the rights of non-citizens. For instance, Creek law declared "No non-citizen shall, on account of marriage with citizens of this Nation, acquire any right pertaining or belong to a citizen of this Nation," marking a departure from the previous custom of citizenship by acquired via adoption. Another law declared, "No non-citizen shall have the right to reside in or to own any improvement in this Nation except for those provided for in treaties."[21] Creeks used these measures to stave off the influx of white intruders and limit the rights of those already residing within their territory.

With the newly reformed education system, the Creek Nation now had an extensive network of well-funded primary and secondary institutions that produced increasingly well-educated citizens. As a national institution, the Creek public schools served as social and political spaces in which the Creek government drew clear boundaries of inclusion and exclusion based on citizenship status. The council prohibited non-citizens from attending the schools without special permission, leaving

[20] "Letter to James Harlin, 1887," series 2, box 4, folder 1, AMRC.

[21] *Constitution and Laws of the Muscogee Nation*, compiled by A.P. McKellop (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1973), 106.

the growing number of Euro-American and African American settlers with limited access to free schooling. By the 1890s, the drastic contrast between the schools designed solely for the benefit of Creek children and the total lack of organized, public schools for non-citizens sparked an escalating crisis.

The Creek Nation's restrictions on non-citizen education shocked many of the Euro-Americans who had sought out new opportunities and advantages in the region. For instance, James T. Spencer, who migrated as a child with his parents to the Creek Nation in the 1870s, recalled, "The reason of our removal, was to forge forward into a new country for my parents felt the opportunities were greater than they were back East."[22] Upon arrival, however, emigrants often came face-to-face with the authority of the Creek government. With their exclusion from the public schools, Spencer other non-citizens struggled to provide education for their children. Initially, they had little choice but to yield to Creek laws, negotiate their status within the system, and seek out alternatives.

Subscription schools served as the primary substitute for non-citizen children. One white resident explained, "We had subscription schools for the whites. The school houses were built by subscription and were maintained by each scholar paying one dollar per month."[23] Mrs. Henry, the wife of Hugh Henry, a partner in the Grayson Brothers' ranching business, found she could not send her children to mission schools because "they were just for the Indian children." Subsequently, her husband and a neighbor constructed a subscription school. Limited in size and number, only affluent parents who could afford to pay a monthly fee in order to sustain a teacher and supplies

[22] Interview with James Spencer, ID: 5144, Vol. 86, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.
[23] Interview with Mrs. E.B. Harris, ID: 5143, Vol. 39, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.

attended these establishments. Even then, with only local supervision and limited funds, subscription schools often suffered from poorly trained teachers, inadequate supplies, and ineffectual learning environments.[24]

For those who could afford it, private teachers offered another substitute for the public schools. After Charles Brant, a farmer from Indiana, settled near Okmulgee, he discovered he could not send his children to the mission schools so he hired a tutor from Missouri to teach his four children. She lived in their family home and taught six months out of the year.[25] This, however, was a far more expensive option as compared to funding a subscription school. Many white children, especially those in rural areas, simply went without formal education.[26]

Some non-citizens also leaned upon missionaries to provide schooling. Parents drew on local church networks, consisting of both clergy and Creek politicians, for assistance. For instance, in 1881, Methodist preacher J. Ross appealed to his Methodist brother, Principal Chief Samuel Checote, for permission to open a private school within the Creek Nation. He assured Checote that the school would be "self-supporting" and would require only permission, not funding, from the Creek government. Ross also assured Checote that the proposed school would not simply cater to any interested non-citizen family; instead, it would be exclusively open to interested "Indian children and white children who are here according to the law," and not white or African American intruders. Ross and other missionaries knew the bounds of their roles as educators and

[24] Interview with Mrs. Hugh Henry, ID: 0000, Vol. 41, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.
[25] Interview with Charles Brant, ID: 6185, Vol. 10, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.
[26] Joe Jackson, "The History of Education in Eastern Oklahoma from 1898 to 1915" (PhD. diss, University of Oklahoma, 1950), 24.

clearly did not want to risk losing favor with the council by compounding the intruder problem.[27]

The Creek Nation was not alone in restricting non-citizens from its schools. Other Native nations in Indian Territory took the same measures, intensifying the scale of the growing crisis. For instance, Aminda Hanley and her siblings, the children of a white teacher and a former Confederate soldier, experienced this type of exclusion in the Cherokee Nation since the "Cherokee tribal laws forbade white children from attending the established Indian schools." A number of other white families resided illegally in the Cherokee Nation near the Hanley family. They viewed the lack of education for their children as a "pressing matter" and persuaded Hanley's mother to begin a subscription school in her home, for which they paid two dollars a month per child.[28] In the Chickasaw Nation, Jim Campbell, the father of seven or eight children, hired a private tutor to come stay in his home.[29] Though they pursued these alternatives, the majority of non-citizens in the Five Nations lacked access to formal schooling.

The Native governments, however, did not deny school privileges to the white population simply as a process of race-based exclusion. Creeks made a distinction between citizens and non-citizens, a political status rather than a racial category, as an assertion of sovereignty. Therefore, they selectively made exceptions for Euro-Americans who sought to reside in their nation legally and provide services to its citizens. For instance, white laborers and white teachers often received permits live and work in the nation and send their children to school. Minnie Fryer, the daughter of a

[27] J. Ross to Col. Sam Checote, June 15, 1881, CNR, roll 49, slide 38532.
[28] Interview with Aminda Latta Hanley, ID: 9463, Vol. 38, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.
[29] Interview with Mrs. T.A. Arnold, ID: 4926, Vol. 3, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.

white laborer, initially attended a private subscription school directed by a Presbyterian minister in North Fork. This changed when her father received a permit from the government to reside in the Creek Nation because he had been contracted to lay the stone for the new Creek Council House. Fryer and her siblings received permission to attend "school there with the Indian children" as long as her father paid tuition to Creek government.[30] She went on to attend high school and then, like many Creek children who attended the national schools, became inspired to serve as an educator in the system. She first taught in a "full-blood neighborhood" north of Wetumka, then at Thop-thoc-co, a remote district forty miles west of Eufaula. Later, she served as a matron in the Coweta Boarding School and Eufaula Schools.[31] As Fryer's case suggests, the Creek government excluded those Euro-Americans who had no claim to political inclusion. They did no simply bar all Euro-Americans from attending and teaching in Creek institutions based on race.

The influx of a large number of African American intruders, however, complicated questions of citizenship and education in the nation. Many settled in areas already occupied by Creek freedmen, became adopted members of the towns, and used communal lands. This made a clear distinction between who belonged and who did not difficult to ascertain. As George Stidham observed, "I think the feeling toward the colored people in our nation is very friendly but there has been such a vast increase in

[30] Interview with Minnie Fryer Finnigan, ID: 5186, Vol. 30, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC.

[31] Interview with Minnie Fryer Finnigan, ID: 5186, Vol. 30, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC. In addition to homegrown Euro-American educators like Fryer, Creek politicians often recruited qualified white educators from the states to improve their schools. For instance, Pleasant Porter recruited Laura Newcomb from Kansas to teach in the public schools. See "Experiences of a Pioneer Woman: Interview with Laura E. Harsha," Indian Pioneer Papers 40:2-10, WHC. The national council required all teachers to attend the nation's normal school for teacher training and to pass examinations before they received an appointment. Whether white or Creek, these measures ensured that "none but well educated persons should be appointed." See "Report of L.C. Perryman, Chairman for the Committee on Education, to the House of Kings & Warriors," October 23, 1885, CRN, roll 49, slide 38582.

our population that it has been a very hard matter to know just who are entitled to rights here and who are not. They are increasing so fast that it bothers us to determine who are citizens." Afro-Creeks more readily accepted the large number of African Americans who fled to the nation to escape the oppressive Jim Crow conditions in the South.[32]

In Afro-Creek communities, racial and political identities became increasingly blurred between Creek freedmen who carried the distinct "colored" status and African American migrants who joined their communities. In these communities, however, fair and equal educational access remained an ongoing concern. In some cases, communities lobbied the Creek Council to ensure educational opportunities for non-citizens, even if they would not fund them. For instance, in 1887, fifty-seven Creek citizens submitted a petition to the House of Kings and the House of Warriors imploring the government to show leniency to a family of African American intruders. The petition, headed by leading Afro-Creek Simon Brown, requested that the family of Ira Cain, who led the Evangel School under the direction of the Baptist Home Missionary Society, "not be reported as intruders and embarrassed in their work." Evangel opened in 1883 as a subscription school patronized by both Afro-Creek citizens and African American non-citizens where Cain had worked largely "at his own expense and without salary." As the petitioners explained, "There are in our midst renters' families who have no privileges in our schools. These are provided for in Evangel Mission." The

[32] Testimony of G.W. Stidham, "Investigation of condition of Indians in Indian Territory, d: pt. 2; "Testimony on industrial, social, moral, and political condition, primarily of five civilized tribes, and condition of freedmen in Indian Territory," 2363 S.rp.1278/4, May 18, 1885, 152.; Chang, *Color of the Land*, 57

community felt "the missionary and educational work of this family" warranted their exemption from an intruder status.[33]

As these cases suggest, flexible education policy in the Creek Nation provided a minority of non-citizens with opportunities to learn and teach in the national schools. Nevertheless, it left the majority of intruders without options for a free education. As more and more people flooded into Creek country during the 1890s, non-citizens increasingly challenged their exclusion and their inability to organize their own public schools. This growing discontent spread throughout the region as settlers found their children shut out from the Native school systems.

White settlers began to demand that the federal government provide access to a free education.[34] For instance, 218 members of the Grand Army of the Republic of Indian Territory sent a petition to Congress pleading for assistance. They explained, "the Indians have suitable provisions to educate their children, but that they do not allow the white or colored children to attend their schools." Because of this, they feared "our children are growing up in ignorance." Indignant, the petitioners placed the responsibilities on Congress to provide educational privileges for their children: "Our people are too poor to pay for the education of the children, and we feel it is the duty of your honorable body to make suitable provisions for the maintenance of free public schools."[35] The contrast between their experiences and those of Native peoples in the region were stark. Not only had the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and

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[33] "Petition to J. Perryman, Chief, Muskogee Nation," February 5, 1887, CRN, roll 49, slide 38590; Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 136.

[34] Jackson, "The History of Education in Eastern Oklahoma," 43-44.

[35] "Memorial of the Grand Army of the Republic to the Sentate and House of Representatives of the United States," "Education of White and Negro Children in Indian Territory," 3679 H.doc.310, House of Representatives, 55th Congress, February 15, 1898.

Seminole nations shown an aptitude for "civilization," they had clearly succeeded in building their own "civilizations" and excluded members of the Euro-American society in the process.

White Americans who often considered themselves racially and culturally superior to the Native peoples were unaccustomed to being denied political rights and other opportunities. Because the majority of these settlers adhered to a strict racial hierarchy in which they dominated, they chafed at their lower political status within the bounds of a sovereign Indian nation. For these colonizers, physical removal of the Native population no longer seemed a viable option. Stripping away sovereignty and indigenous political distinctiveness, however, remained a feasible solution. But what prevented sovereign and "civilized" Native and non-Native nations from co-existing? Just like during Indian Removal six decades prior, it was the Five Tribes' very propensity for Euro-American "civilization" that most antagonized.[36] Over half a century after Indian Removal, however, the so-called "Indian Problem" had grown far more complex for American citizens.

For decades, federal officials had faced a dilemma over how to handle the unique "Indian Problem" in Indian Territory. The distinctive historical experiences of the Five Nations, their treaty rights, and their attainments in "civilization" made them outliers to most federal Indian policy initiatives. Assimilation remained the overarching goal for American policymakers and reformers, but these Native nations maintained their own schools separate from federal boarding schools. As an extension of

[36] Anthropologist Patrick Wolfe asks a similar question for the removal crisis faced by the Creeks and the other Southeastern Native peoples six decades prior in asking, "Why should genteel Georgians wish to rid themselves of such cultivated neighbours?" Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 396.

assimilation policy, officials introduced a complementary campaign designed to strip Native Americans of their identity while simultaneously dispossessing them of their land and resources. In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act, which allotted reservation lands into private lots and made the surplus available for sale. Once again, the Creek Nation, in addition to the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole Nations, gained an exemption from this federal policy. Their leaders successfully lobbied their case based on the argument that they had well-established schools, churches, economies, and republican systems of government.[37] This, however, was a temporary reprieve.

As Euro-American settlers in the Native nations became increasingly dissatisfied with their status, they compelled the federal government to extend jurisdiction over Indian Territory. For U.S. officials, the lack of educational opportunities for American citizens residing within the bounds of the Creek Nation and the other sovereign Native nations served as a palatable justification for this process. After all, rhetorically speaking, providing schools for helpless, white children sounded far more benevolent than violating treaties, stealing land, and systematically exploiting Native peoples. Emboldened, federal officials increased pressure on the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole governments. Well aware of the motivations of the white settlers and policymakers, the Creek government officially declared that "any change in status that would include the Muskogee Nation within the limits of an organized State of the American Union, would be contrary to the best

[37] Kent Carter, *Dawes Commission: And the Allotment of the Five Civilized Tribes, 1893-1914* (Orem: Ancestry Publishing, 1999), 1-2; David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 21-23.

interests of the citizens of the Nation" and that any such action would be "deprecated and resisted by all means."[38] Nevertheless, in March 1893 Congress included in the 1893 Indian Appropriation Bill provisions to establish a commission to negotiate with select members of the Five Tribes to encourage the allotment of land into private lots.[39]

The legislation marked the beginning of a several years' struggle between the Creek Nation's attempts to retain sovereign control over their territory, government, and institutions and the commission's attempts to make them relinquish that control. In November 1893, President Grover Cleveland appointed Henry L. Dawes to head the commission and Archibald McKennon and Meridith Kidd to serve as the other members. The commissioners traveled to Indian Territory and began meeting with delegates of the Native nations in early 1894. Just like earlier removal negotiations, they operated under the false assumption that the so called "half-breeds and educated full bloods" monopolized wealth and power and that with a little convincing the "full blood" population would acquiesce to allotment.[40]

In February, the leaders of the Five Tribes held a council in Muskogee, Creek Nation, to discuss the commissioners' objectives and hear their propositions for allotment. In their address, the commissioners fully admitted that previous treaties "provided tribal governments and land holding in common should be continued indefinitely." Nevertheless, they explained that when the federal government had agreed to that provision, "this territory had been far from the habitations of white men, and it could scarcely be anticipated that the tribes would be surrounded by settlements

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[38] *Acts and Resolutions of the National Council of the Muskogee Nation of 1893*, published reprint (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1975), 14.

[39] Carter, *Dawes Commission*, 2-3.

[40] "Editorial on L.C. Perryman, *Indian Journal*, Thursday,, April 12, 184 Vol. 18," typescript, folder 8, L.C. Perryman Collection, WHC.

as now, and that the time would come when there would be in the Territory two white men to one Indian." Their message was clear: U.S. officials did not intend to uphold inconvenient treaty rights of the sovereign Native nations because the rights and privileges of Euro-American colonizers superseded them.[41]

Dawes, Kidd, and McKennon emphasized that the federal government intended to remove Native governments' control over their education systems. While the privatization of land certainly loomed large in the commissioners' arguments, the dissolution of self-government and institutions among the Five Nations served as the overarching goal. As they declared in their address, "Believe me when we tell you the present anomalous condition existing in the Five Tribes cannot last." Dismissing the legitimacy of the public schools and highlighting the lack of education for intruders, they declared, "Twenty thousand children, Indians, white and colored, are growing to maturity without the opportunities of obtaining a common school education." Insulting the leading men gathered at the council, the commissioners threatened, "This is the road to barbarism, and the United States cannot allow its people to travel this path without making all possible efforts to prevent it."[42] This implied that if the Native governments did not acquiesce to provisions for non-citizen education, they would drag Americans down to the supposedly uneducated and morally inferior level of Native peoples. Despite the commissioners' appeals, after three days the international council ended

[41] "Address of the United States Commission to the Five Tribes, Muskogee Indian Territory," February 12, 1894, Hargrett Collection, Gilcrease Museum.

[42] "Address of the United States Commission to the Five Tribes, Muskogee Indian Territory," February 12, 1894, Hargrett Collection, GM.

with the Native nations "condemning any change."[43] This, however, did not deter the Dawes Commission, which continued to try to negotiate terms of allotment.

On April 3, Principal Chief L.C. Perryman called a mass meeting of all Creek citizens at the capital in Okmulgee so that "a full expression of our views can be given." Over 2,000 Creek citizens gathered around the council house as McKennon and Kidd addressed them from the veranda. They reiterated their message and emphasized that Creek citizens must agree to the commission's terms or Congress would annul their previous treaties and enact allotment through legislation. They threatened that resistance was futile and would make the process further disadvantageous to the Creek Nation. Next, Perryman addressed the crowd but intentionally withheld his opinion in order to demonstrate to McKennon and Kidd that he held no powers of coercion over the Creek citizens. Instead, he simply asked "those who favored allotment and a change in government" to move to the left side of the capital's yard and those who opposed it to move to the right. En masse, the entire crowd moved to the right showing unanimous opposition.[44]

The following day, the Creek Council held a special session "to address the maintenance of our independence and existence as a free nation." In a passionate address before the council, Perryman praised the recent nation building efforts and emphasized the success of Creek self-government. He declared, "The Creek people have advanced in civilization and prosperity from a scattered, disorganized tribe without fixed laws or suited habits of industry to a prosperous country and a nation governed by wise laws. This is the condition of the Creek people today, and it is a condition they

[43] Report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, 3281 Senate, Mis. Doc. 24, 53 Congress, 3rd Session, December 10, 1894, 1.

[44] "Proclamation of L.C. Perryman," typescript in folder 7, L.C. Perryman Collection, WHC.

have attained under laws and customs of their own making." In particular, he cited the success of the education system as evidence of this. He announced, "We have an admirable public school fund ample to keep all the schools of our nation open the greater part of the year; thus providing the means by which every child of our country may obtain a good English education free." Perryman maintained that the Creeks' ability to govern themselves, build and exert control over their institutions, and progress as a nation all while preserving important traditions had led to prosperity and contentment.[45]

Although adamantly opposed to allotment, Perryman and the council members were willing to consider some measure of compromise on the school issue. Nevertheless, they refused to yield any autonomy in the process. As Pleasant Porter explained, "there are two things that the Indians jealously guard, and they will not entertain any plan that looks to their present abrogation. These are our autonomy and land tenure."[46] Subsequently, Creek leaders refused to allocate the nation's funding toward non-citizens. Council members discussed providing the children of non-citizens access to the national schools "upon payment of a reasonable tuition." Many members supported universal education but did not want the financial burden of educating non-citizens. They tabled the issue and then invited the Dawes Commission to conduct a full investigation of the school system. They did so "believing it will convince all fair minded persons" that the proposed changes would "disturb, paralyze and arrest a happy

[45] "Message of L.C. Perryman to the Honorable Members of the National Council," April 4, 1894, folder 8, L.C. Perryman Collection, WHC.

[46] "An interview with Porter in which he expresses opposition to the Dawes Commission," April 19, 1894, box 1, folder 8, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

state of advancement that at present characterizes the condition of our people."[47] When the Creek Council met again for its regular session in October, they adjourned without taking any further action on the Dawes Commission's propositions.[48]

In the years that followed, not all Creeks remained adverse to change or compromise on the education issue. More open to negotiations than others, Pleasant Porter recognized that providing education for children served as a common goal between Creek citizens and white settlers. Porter summed up the situation explaining, "We recognize that the whites are a permanent and increasing part of our population and that efficient government and educational facilities for them are necessary and proper." In an 1894 interview, Porter explained that should the U.S. federal government establish a free school system for white children, the Creek Board of Education would be willing to collaborate with them to expand opportunities for both white and Native children. Moreover, in isolated communities where the population could not sustain separate schools, Creek and whites could attend together. He made clear, however, that his government would in no way make these concessions unless the U.S. provided a legal guarantee that provisions for non-citizen education in the Creek Nation would not come at the cost of citizens' schooling. He summed up the Creeks' dilemma stating, "We understand the importance of education and want the whites to have every possible educational advantage, but we cannot undertake to educate them or throw open our schools to them indiscriminately without a guarantee of remuneration

[47] "Preamble and resolutions adopted by the council of the Muskogee Nation, in answer to the proposition of the United States Commission," April 4, 1894, folder 8, L.C. Perryman Collection, WHC.

[48] Report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, 3281 Senate, Mis. Doc. 24, 53 Congress, 3rd Session, December 10, 1894, 3.

and some proper system."[49] He recognized that without strict parameters, including non-citizen children in Creek schools would incentivize further encroachment on Creek land and resources.

As the Dawes Commission' increasingly took measures to strip away their sovereignty, Creeks became more and more opposed to compromise. In 1895, Creeks elected Isparhecher, the longtime conservative leader characterized as "full-blood" and illiterate, as Principal Chief. Isparhecher's steadfast opposition to allotment further undermined the Dawes Commission's assertions that a minority of educated, "mixed-blood" leaders coerced "full bloods" into resisting allotment in order to protect their own monopoly on wealth and resources. By electing Isparhecher to power, Creek citizens also sent a clear message that they would not simply allow the commission to negotiate them into obliteration.[50]

After two years of frustration, the Dawes Commission followed through on their threat and turned to Congress for unilateral legislative action. Although Grover Cleveland had advocated allotment through negotiation, his successor William McKinley had no qualms about using the force of the federal government to expedite the process. Piece by piece, Congress dictated legislation that dealt shattering blows to the sovereignty of the Native nations. First, on June 10, 1896, Congress approved an amendment to the Indian Appropriations bill that allowed the Dawes Commission to approve or deny applications of citizenship for the Five Tribes. As such, this act ultimately stripped away a fundamental sovereign right of any nation—the ability to determine citizenship. Isparhecher ignored the Dawes Commission's request for the

[49] "An interview with Porter in which he expresses opposition to the Dawes Commission," April 19, 1894, box 1, folder 8, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

[50] Carter, *Dawes Commission,* 23-30.

Creek tribal rolls, prompting the commission to initiate its own census. Next, on June 7, 1897, Congress added a further amendment to the Indian Appropriations bill that "essentially abolished the tribal courts by increasing the jurisdiction of the federal courts to everyone 'irrespective of race.'"[51] Then, a follow up measure stipulated any laws passed by the Native nations' legislatures after January 1, 1898 would not be upheld if the President disapproved, eliminating the ability of the Native nations to self-govern.[52] Without the consent of the sovereign indigenous nations, the federal government broke numerous treaty promises and extended its authority, paving the way for full colonization of the region.

Several leading Creeks recognized that should Congress fully impose allotment on the Five Nations, they would need to be sure to protect the interests of their people to the best of their abilities. Provisions for education remained among the highest concerns. In November 1896, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Seminole delegates met at South McAlester in the Choctaw Nation and adopted resolutions to this effect. At the convention, the delegates again emphasized their successful nation-building in Indian Territory. The delegates outlined their stance: "We represent 65,000 sober, industrious, self-supporting, and God-fearing people… who came to a wilderness driven by force, and made it a cultivated land – peoples who have erected schools, churches, and courts of justice and governments under which they have found safety and happiness." The delegates recognized that if they should be forced to concede autonomy, it would have a devastating effect on Creek citizens. They wanted education

[51] Carter, *Dawes Commission*, 25.

[52] Under pressure, the Creek Special Commission signed an agreement with the Dawes Commission in September 1897 but the Creek Council voted against ratifying the agreement. Carter, *Dawes Commission*, 25.

to serve as a safeguard. In their resolution, they wrote "We realize the great benefits our people have derived from our educational institutions, and also that many of our people will by the new conditions be reduced to destitution." Thus, "being anxiously desirous of providing for the children of such citizens, we wish to set aside land out of our domain to be a permanent investment for the benefit of certain educational institutions sufficient for the education of these children."[53] In terms of protecting their posterity, education was the priority.

Although a staunch political conservative, Isparhecher never opposed educational opportunities for Creek citizens and likewise hoped to protect the newly reformed and expanded school system. In a passionate ultimatum to the Dawes Commission in 1897, he denounced the intentions of Congress as a "flaming sword…an everlasting threat" hanging over Creeks in an "earnest struggle for existence." Isparhecher articulated the reasons why Creeks opposed allotment, including a desire to control the fate of their own children and the future of their people. He pointed out the hypocrisy of the recent legislation, reminding federal officials that "The original policy was to secure to the Indians a country free from white intrusion, where they could grow into a civilized people." He further recounted the trials and tribulations of Creeks through removal, the Civil War, and recent political and economic strife, arguing that Creeks grew stronger with each challenge. In particular, he effusively praised the schools, including the recent expansion and reform efforts. "Every child of school age has now a chance of acquiring an education absolutely free to himself and parents. We do not believe that this system of education can be replaced by one better suited to our

[53] Resolutions adopted in convention by the commissioners of the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, Cherokees, and Seminoles, in session at South McAlester on call of the governor of the Choctaw Nation, passed November 12, 1896, Hargrett Collection, GM

people," declared Isparhecher, making it clear that Creek citizens did not want federally imposed education.[54]

Despite the efforts of Isparhecher and other leading Creeks to protect their education system, Euro-American colonizers continued to petition the federal government to intervene. In response, Congress commissioned a report entitled "Education of White and Negro Children in The Indian Territory." It found that an estimated 30,000 white children and 25,000 African American children "were shut out from the schools supported by the governments of the five nations of Indians who control the territory, as well as from those supported by the United States for the benefit of Indian youth." The report outlined the lack of rights exercised by non-Native residents and complained, "The white and negro resident are there by sufferance only, having no voice in the government under which they live or ownership in the soil on which they reside." Not only did the exclusionary policies of the Native nations privilege Native over non-Native residents, it also prevented those settlers from enjoying the "advantages possessed by those in all other parts of the vast domain of the United States." Specifically, the report asserted that the lack of educational privileges would have dire consequences for the large population of American citizens whose very civilization would be called into question if they fell into pauperism while their Native neighbors thrived.[55]

In response to the findings, W. J. Harris, the Commissioner of the Bureau of Education, emphasized the potential threat posed by the growing populace of

[54] "The Creek Ultimatum of Isparecher," November, 1897, folder 22, Isparecher Collection, WHC.

[55] "Education of White and Negro Children in Indian Territory," 3679 H.doc.310, House of Representatives, 55th Congress, February 15, 1898.

uneducated white and African American settlers in Indian Territory. Sending a stern warning to the Secretary of the Interior, Harris explained the region would likely turn into a "vast slum into which that dangerous class of people" would be "a menace to the civilization of the States surrounding the Territory." He pragmatically recognized that the Native nations should not shoulder the burden of educating non-citizens. He argued the infeasibility of such an arrangement, explaining, "It is too much to expect that 51,000 Indians will look after the wants of 130,000 white or colored peoples." Nevertheless, his sympathies did not lie with the Native nations whose territory had been occupied. He reserved his concern for the citizens of the American republic. Embodying the cant of settler colonialism, Harris privileged American "civilization" over Native "civilizations." He recommended immediate Congressional action to resolve the crisis.[56]

Harris' report and call for action served the larger colonial aims of the federal government by providing Congress with leverage to colonize Native lands and resources and to reinforce Euro-American dominance over indigenous inhabitants. The Dawes Commission also confirmed petitioners' complaints against the Native governments, arguing that a situation in which Native peoples exerted dominance over Euro-Americans "is very rare among pioneer settlers under the most favorable circumstances" and thus could not be sustained.[57] Though the Native nations had subverted the socio-political hierarchy created by settler colonialism, the Dawes

[56] W.J. Harris, Commissioner of Education, to the Secretary of Interior, January 26, 1989, "Education of White and Negro Children in Indian Territory," 3679 H.doc.310, House of Representatives, 55th Congress, February 15, 1898.

[57] Report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, "Education of White and Negro Children in Indian Territory," 3679 H.doc.310, House of Representatives, 55th Congress, February 15, 1898.

Commission and other federal officials made it clear that indigenous sovereignty would not trump colonizers' privileges indefinitely.

The root cause of American colonizers' dilemma seemed apparent: "Not only have these people no voice in the government under which they live, but they have no ownership in the soil on which they reside. Their home is on the land of another, and they are there by permission of the owner only."[58] Nevertheless, the solution was far less clear. One solution, and inarguably the most legally sound one, would have been to recognize Native sovereignty and remove the intruders. At the very least, the U.S. government could have made it clear to those squatters who chose to occupy a different sovereign nation that the U.S. had no jurisdiction over its autonomous political institutions. Instead, settlers and federal officials used a rationale of settler colonialism to reverse the narrative. They cast settlers as victims and Native peoples as obstacles to progress. Just as Commissioner of Education Harris suggested the situation posed a threat to American "civilization," others used a similar rhetoric. As one official maintained:

> I doubt if there is a section in the United States today in which there is such a deplorable condition as to education for the masses, outside the incorporated towns referred to, as this Territory presents. A Territory peopled, too, by a considerable proportion of those who believe that education is and should be the corner stone of our American institutions, and one that should be firmly laid in Territories aspiring to statehood.[59]

Federal officials justified further colonial policies by casting white squatters and placing blame with the Native nations for preventing them from participating in this fundamental American institution. Although the recent legislative attacks on the

[58] Report of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, "Education of White and Negro Children in Indian Territory," 3679 H.doc.310, House of Representatives, 55th Congress, February 15, 1898.

[59] "The Results of an Investigation of a System to Provide Taxation to Provide Schools in Indian Territory," H.doc. 522, House of Representatives, 57th Congress, April 1, 1902, 3.

indigenous governments had already considerably diminished their ability to self-govern, this education crisis served as a further impetus not only to force these governments to relinquish control over their schools but to dissolve their governments altogether.

Kansas Representative Charles Curtis led the crusade for tribal dissolution in Washington, D.C. He touted himself as an expert on Native people because of his one-eighth Kaw heritage, but he did not maintain strong ties to his Native American roots. Curtis presented himself as an advocate for the welfare of Native Americans and publicly criticized the Dawes Act. His concern, however, was that the Dawes Act did not go far enough because it exempted the Five Tribes.[60] He introduced a bill three times to expand the Dawes Act and failed but in light of the report on "Education of White and Negro Children in The Indian Territory," he reintroduced it again in early February, 1898. It was deceptively titled "An Act for the Protection of the People of Indian Territory, and for other purposes." As historian Kent Carter explains, "The 'protection' part of the proposed legislation was intended to help all of the unfortunate whites (many from Curtis's home state, Kansas) who had entered Indian Territory, whether invited or not, but who had no voice in government, no schools, and no protection against criminals."[61]

Whatever his ideological rationalization may have been, capitalistic and material motivations drove Curtis. As biographer William E. Unrau explains, "To Curtis, the business of non-Indians in Indian Territory was business, and he consequently

[60] William Unrau, *Mixed Bloods and Tribal Dissolution: Charles Curtis and the Quest for Tribal Identity* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989), 116-119.

[61] Carter, *Dawes Commission*, 34.

supported the unfettered invasion of corporate America into the region."[62] He, as well as members of the Dawes Commission, had close ties to and personal investments in oil companies, and he sought to use allotment to allow the industry to move into the area. In order to do so, these politicians negotiated terms of allotment among the Five Tribes while simultaneously setting up trust companies to make agreements with oil companies to sell them the land. Of course, the federal officials cloaked these unscrupulous tactics under the rhetoric of uplifting Native Americans and saving poor, white settlers in Indian Territory from ignorance and pauperism.[63] Though greed often motivated individuals, the cause of education seemed a far more benevolent justification for the colonial policies enacted by Congress.

Despite the strong opposition from the Creeks and others, McKinley signed the Curtis Act into law on June 28, 1898. This act annulled time-honored treaties, undercut Native sovereignty, and catered to the desires of white settlers. According to the legislation, the Five Nations' governments were officially to dissolve by 1906 and then merge with Oklahoma Territory for statehood. Congress had clear intentions for the Curtis Act, but the actual implementation process and the struggle between federal, local, and indigenous power in the region led to a series of jurisdictional and procedural quagmires.[64] The legislation clearly intended to shift authority for the Five Nations school systems to the federal government and to provide schooling opportunities for non-Indians. Nevertheless, Congress did not fully plan the logistics of how the federal government would execute this process.

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[62] Unrau, *Mixed Bloods and Tribal Dissolution,* 118.
[63] Unrau, *Mixed Bloods and Tribal Dissolution,* 120.
[64] Unrau, *Mixed Bloods and Tribal Dissolution,* 122-123.

The "plight of the white children in Indian Territory" served as a powerful impetus for the Curtis Act, but the act did not usher in immediate relief to parents demanding schools.[65] While it did provide settlers with the ability to incorporate cities and towns with over two hundred residents and to "establish and maintain free school in such cities and towns," there was a catch: inhabitants could only support schools by levying taxes and only "after title is secured from the tribe." In addition to this clause, the Curtis Act left few options for the thousands of children in rural areas too isolated to incorporate. Subsequently, in the months and years that followed the Curtis Act, Euro-American communities continued to pressure the federal government to take further action. That is why six months after he approved the legislation, President McKinley emphasized the schooling needs of white children in Indian Territory in his State of the Union address. With no clear-cut solution, it remained a national concern throughout the territorial period.

The outcry of support for white children from federal officials and U.S. citizens largely did not extend to the already marginalized African American population. For instance, after the President of the University of Missouri learned that settlers in Indian Territory had little access to education, he led the University Council and the Missouri State Teachers Association in issuing a Memorial to Congress. They demanded assistance specifically for the "thousands of white children in the Territory that are thus deprived of public school education of any sort." Because it remained "impossible for the whites of Indian Territory to tax real estate," the memorial requested that in the interim federal government use U.S. treasury funds to establish a system of "free public

[65] Debo, *And Still the Waters Run,* 70.

schools to be administered by the proper authorities at Washington."[66] Another concerned citizen, F.A. Mitchell of Whitesboro, Texas, inquired about "the probability of free white schools in the Indian Territory this year."[67] As the American public became increasingly aware of the situation, a narrative that portrayed Euro-American children as victims, rather than African American or Native American children, circulated.

Some unscrupulous observers even tried to capitalize on the sympathies of Euro-Americans for their white brethren in Indian Territory. For instance, a man who identified himself as L.S. Mason sent letters to teachers in Missouri on behalf of the Territory Teachers League lamenting the condition of "thousands of white children in the Indian Territory who are ignorant of the first rudiments of an education." The letter emphasized the disparities between "The Indian" whose "education is provided by the government" and the white children, who had "no provision" made for them. Mason claimed the League had canvassed Indian Territory and "built a thousand school houses, organized schools, and procured subscriptions." This offered a "splendid opening" to any teacher who wished to serve this cause and keep a guaranteed position once Oklahoma entered statehood. All an interested party needed to do was send $5.00 fee to receive an appointment. The Territory Teachers League, however, did not exist. Neither did the thousand schoolhouses or the guaranteed teaching positions promised in

[66] University of the State of Missouri Memorial to Congress, December 20, 1899, box 28, RG 48, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NARA, College Park, MA (herafter cited as NACP)

[67] F.A. Mitchell to the Secretary of Interior, June 14, 1899, box 16, RG 48, Letters Received, 1898-1907, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NACP.

the letter. Instead, it was a scam designed to take advantage of the employment needs, benevolent impulses, and even racial prejudices of educators.[68]

In addition to the public outcry, Euro-Americans in Indian Territory continued to agitate for federal intervention. They invoked a discourse that simultaneously cast themselves as the superior racial group in the Territory and as the victims of a federal government that had failed to provide for its citizens. For instance, the residents of Marietta, Indian Territory, held a mass meeting and unanimously drafted a petition to the Secretary of the Interior. The document emphasized the clear failures of the Curtis Act, which had the "purpose of creating and maintaining public free schools…for the white children." Completely dismissing the legitimacy of the Native institutions, governments, and the Natives' very presence, the petitioners claimed to have "developed that country from a howling wilderness to one of the most fertile countries now in existence." Indignantly, the petitioners went even further claiming, "the white people…have been the greatest factors in bringing about a reform movement and civilizing the inhabitants of the Territory than everything else combined." Displaying their own ignorance, they bitterly maintained that their only repayment had been to suffer through their children maturing in "utter ignorance of the fundamental principles of an education."[69]

In December 1898, a newly formed organization, the Indianola Free School Society, also issued a memorial to Congress to address the same problem. This petition

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[68] L.S. Mason on behalf of the Territory Teachers League, November 16, 1903, box 46, RG 48, Special School Files, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NACP; John Benedict to J. George Wright, U.S. Indian Inspector, December 9, 1903, box 46, RG 48, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NACP.

[69] "Resolutions of the town of Marietta adopted by mass meeting" to the Secretary of the Interior, December 14, 1898, box 45, RG 48, Special School Files, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NACP.

also invokes the same intertwined message of victimization and racial superiority. Condemning the federal government and calling for immediate action, the petitioners claimed public education was their undeniable right as citizens of the republic: "We…observe that the white people resident in Indian Territory are the only people (the most savage Indian tribes not exempted) over which the United States has ever exercised sovereignty and denied them a system of public education." Not only were the white residents entitled to education, they asserted that as the naturally more "civilized" race, they were more deserving than other races. The settlers failed to understand that the Creek Nation supported its own schools through annuity payments from land sales, rather than through federal subsidies. Blatantly dismissing the well-established, Native school systems that had denied them access, the petitioners argued, "It requires but little effort for statesmen to see that it is easier to preserve the civilization of the civilized than to civilize the savage."[70] The complaints persisted. By 1904, the Department of the Interior had "two hundred petitions for new schools" and more "coming in everyday from all parts of the Territory" from "white people powerless in the matter of taxing themselves.[71] Their collective message powerfully reflects the racialized patterns that would define education in Oklahoma in the decades that followed.

Within this framework, the educational opportunities of Afro-Indians and African Americans in Indian Territory became increasingly tenuous. Federal officials used the statistic of 25,000 African American children as a political tool to emphasize

[70] "A Memorial Relating to the Education of White Children in Indian Territory," H.doc. 242, House of Representatives, 55th Congress, February 20, 1899.

[71] John D. Benedict, Secretary of Schools in Indian Territory, to the Secretary of the Interior, July 13, 1904, box 46, RG 48, Special School Files, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NACP.

the large population without educational privileges. Following the Curtis Act, however, politicians showed little concern for this demographic. In addition to the ideology of white supremacy espoused by many federal officials and settlers, residents of African descent also still struggled with social marginalization within the Five Nations. In the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations, the governments had denied freedmen and African American migrants schooling privileges since emancipation. Although the Creek Nation recognized Afro-Creeks as legal citizens, as Chief Justice of the Creek Nation, George Stidham, explained, "we try to make the schools separate" whenever possible.[72] With the white population attempting to assert dominance over both the Native American and African American populations in the territory, the future of black schooling opportunities, especially for citizens of the indigenous nations, became unclear in the months immediately following the Curtis Act.

Despite the lack of federal and public support, African American communities throughout Indian Territory continued grassroots efforts to build and maintain schools. Some found that the confusion over Native and federal jurisdiction offered new opportunities for organizing schools. For instance, with Creek authority severely weakened, the African Methodist Episcopal Church opened the Sission Industrial Institute, a school for "children of the African Race, irrespective of citizenship or residence." The Creek Council never "gave approval to the establishment of the school or in any way legislated its rights."[73] Others used the same tactics as white settlers and appealed directly to the federal government. Ed Colbert, for instance, sent a pleading

[72] Testimony of G.W. Stidham, "Investigation of condition of Indians in Indian Territory, d: pt. 2; Testimony on industrial, social, moral, and political condition, primarily of five civilized tribes, and condition of freedmen in Indian Territory," 2363 S.rp.1278/4, May 18, 1885, 152.

[73] "Reports Result of investigation relative to Sission Industrial Institute," February 13, 1903, box 46, RG 48, Special School Files, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NACP

letter directly to the Secretary of Interior on behalf of the Chickasaw freedmen. He explained, "we the colard people has a hard way to get schools" since "parents ar too poor" and "we had never had no free school." Colbert asked for one "as all other territorys has got."[74] Though African American communities shrewdly took advantage of the shifting political configuration during the territorial period, this marked only a brief window of opportunity before Oklahoma entered the union.

Between the already existing separate "colored schools" and the incoming settlers' belief in white supremacy, Jim Crow reared his ugly head at the turn of the century. In the newly incorporated towns in Indian Territory, whites established segregated school systems for the "Negro" population. Though debates over integrated Native and white schools dominated debates on education reform, segregation for both African American and Afro-Indian residents seemed a foregone conclusion. As one federal official in Indian Territory maintained, "The question of education for the Negro as a race is also well defined by public sentiment, and separate schools have always been provided for them where education facilities have been offered."[75] With the legal dissolution of the Five Nations, the political distinction between Indian freedmen and African Americans disappeared. For some, including the Choctaw and Chickasaw freedmen, segregated schools seemingly offered better educational opportunities than the full exclusion they experienced under the Native education systems. For Creek freedmen, however, the proposed segregated public schools dependent signaled diminishing advantages.

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[74] Ed Colbert to the Secretary of the Interior, Dec. 28, 1898, box 45, RG 48, Special School Files, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NACP.

[75] "The Results of an Investigation of a System to Provide Taxation to Provide Schools in Indian Territory," H.doc. 522, House of Representatives, 57th Congress, April 1, 1902, 10.

Despite the early segregation of both African American and Afro-Indian residents, proposals for how to solve the "Indian Problem" advocated assimilation instead. Some Native peoples and Euro-Americans in Indian Territory had long since predicted that integrated schools open to Native and white would be the ultimate solution to the escalating education crisis. Five years prior, Pleasant Porter, who represented a more compromising viewpoint than many of his fellow citizens, asserted that if necessary such a solution could be mutually advantageous to both whites and Natives. Under such an arrangement, Native youths "would grow to manhood with more liberal views towards [white] people and their systems, and the white children would in a like manner reach manhood with more liberal views towards Indian institutions and the fairness and good that is in our people by nature."[76] Porter, however, stipulated that this would only be possible if non-citizens in the Creek Nation paid tuition since Creek citizens would not carry the financial burden of educating them. He did not foresee that the federal government intended to dismantle the Creek education system altogether. And among the majority of Native residents who wished to retain control over their own educational institutions, mixed white and Indian education lacked support.

Many federal officials advocated integrated schools as a long-term plan for Oklahoma statehood. Some argued that "The amalgamation of the whites and Indians under one school system" would mark the ultimate fulfillment of assimilation. For instance, Frank C. Churchill, Special Agent on Taxation for Free Schools in the Indian Territory, provided a detailed report to Congress in 1901 in which he stated, "The

[76] "An interview with Porter in which he expresses opposition to the Dawes Commission," April 19, 1894, box 1, folder 8, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

Indian must lose his identity by absorption, and such absorption will be rapid and positive; and he must soon cease to be recognized as a separate and distinct race. This true, such education will fit him for the responsibilities of American citizenship is due him."[77]

The clear difference between policies of segregation for African Americans and assimilation for Native Americans reflect the differing approaches to the "Indian Problem" and the "Negro Problem" during the Progressive era. As historian Kim Cary Warren explains, reformers at the time hoped that for Native students, white education would "eradicate their 'Indianness,' thereby transforming their various tribal identities into an American one." Conversely, white reformers intended segregated schools for African Americans to prepare "students for a lifetime of marginalization" as laborers who remained "distinctly separate from whites."[78] Though assimilation seemed the far more benevolent option, it too was insidious. Rather than guaranteeing social equality, assimilation required stripping away the sovereignty of independent polities and eradicating the cultural identities of indigenous peoples, privileging Euro-Americans in the process.

Although assimilationist rhetoric made it seem as if mixed schools in Indian Territory would serve the best interests of the Native population, in reality they offered the best possibility for lifting up the white population. After visiting a large family of poor white renters whose children had no means to attend the nearest subscription school ten miles away, Alice Robertson lamented: "In very many places we might have

[77] "The Results of an Investigation of a System to Provide Taxation to Provide Schools in Indian Territory," H.doc. 522, House of Representatives, 57th Congress, April 1, 1902, 11.

[78] Kim Cary Warren, *The Quest for Citizenship: African American and Native American Education in Kansas, 1880-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 2-3.

good schools if there were some way of providing for these poor white renters to attend with the Indian children. The two races are bound to come in contact any way. The time to avoid this is past."[79] These mixed schools would take advantage of the land, buildings, and resources already built by the Native nations and then further depend on the tax dollars of the more affluent Native residents to support the education of poor white children.

This complex situation runs counter to common understanding of white dominance and supposedly "advanced" Euro-American culture. In Indian Territory from the 1850s to the 1890s, many Indian children were better educated than white children were and Native governments dictated the terms of exclusion and inclusion in schools. Unaccustomed to a supposedly inferior race denying them rights, colonizers recoiled at their marginalization. They used a political rhetoric of white supremacy and victimization to pressure the federal government not only to provide free schools for their children but also to dismantle the Native education systems in the process. These Euro-American settlers posed a frightening argument that caught the attention of the American public and drove legislators into action. They argued that if large mass of uneducated white citizens remained in Indian Territory, they would potentially fall into either a state of uncivilized savagery akin to Native Americans or a pool of menial, exploitable laborers equivalent to African Americans. According to white settlers, the continued lack of educational opportunities threatened the security of the entire nation.

[79] Alice Robertson to Senator Platt, April 4, 1902, series 2, box 9, folder 5, AMRC.

As one group of petitioners characterized the situation, it would create "a republic of ignorance" comparable to the reign of terror during the French Revolution.[80]

Rather than allow the republic to "deteriorate into a system of social and political chaos," federal officials shaped new legislation, including the 1898 Curtis Act to privilege Euro-American colonizers at the expense of Native Americans and African Americans in the region.[81] These policies also opened new exploitable land and resources and dismantled the Native nations. By attacking indigenous sovereignty and imposing the sovereignty of the American nation-state, these policies further facilitated settler colonialism. While the state of education in Indian Territory represented a counter-narrative to the broader history of education in the U.S. during the mid-nineteenth century, by the of the turn of the century racial ideology, federal policies, and the ongoing system of settler colonialism reshaped schools in the region to reflect national trends. This does not mean, however, that the Creek Nation simply surrendered their autonomy. In the years following the Curtis Act, Creek citizens actively continued to resist federal authority and attempted to maintain control over their education system and the future of their nation.

[80] "A Memorial Relating to the Education of White Children in Indian Territory," H.doc. 242, House of Representatives, 55th Congress, February 20, 1899.

[81] "A Memorial Relating to the Education of White Children in Indian Territory," H.doc. 242, House of Representatives, 55th Congress, February 20, 1899.

CHAPTER SIX:

THE UNDOING OF THE CREEK NATIONAL SCHOOLS

In August 1899, a local newspaper in Indian Territory published an article that declared, "Affairs educational are growing quite interesting in the Creek country."[1] This was an understatement. The title of the article, "An Educational War," characterized a hostile and public dispute between Creek educational officials and a newly appointed federal Superintendent of Schools for Indian Territory. At the heart of the conflict was the question of who had the ultimate authority over the long established Creek school system: Was it the Superintendent of Public Instruction who represented the Creek Nation, or the official of the United States government who claimed control over Creek education according to recent federal law?[2]

This struggle emerged as part of broader Creek resistance to the 1898 Curtis Act, which had calamitous ramifications for the indigenous nations in Indian Territory. The legislation facilitated the legal dissolution and allotment of the Creek, Choctaw, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Seminole nations but did not provide any detailed provisions for education. It did include, however, a section that stipulated, "No tribal funds shall be hereafter paid to the tribal officials for distributions, but shall be disbursed under such rules as the Secretary of the Interior shall prescribe."[3] In other words, the trust

[1] "An Educational War," *South McAlester Capital,* August 31, 1899, Native American Manuscripts, Western Historical Collection, University of Oklahoma.

[2] A portion of the research in this chapter appears in Rowan Steineker, "An Educational War": Creek Education and Resistance to the Curtis Act, (M.A. thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2011).

[3] John D. Benedict, "My Educational Experience," Indian Pioneer Papers, Vol. 7, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, 131. The official act read: "That no payment of any moneys on any account whatever shall hereafter be made by the United States to any of the tribal governments or to any officer thereof for disbursement, but payments of all sums to members of said tribes shall be made under direction of the Secretary of the Interior by an officer appointed by him; and per capita payments shall be made direct to each individual in lawful money of the United States, and the same shall not be liable to the payment of any previously contracted obligation." See "An act for the

money belonging to the Native nations would no longer be appropriated to their governments for them to fund and oversee their national institutions, including schools, as they saw fit. Though Creeks argued that the Curtis Act did not legally transfer their education system to federal control, the Secretary of the Interior interpreted the legislation to mean he could wield complete power over schools in Indian Territory.

This chapter investigates the nine-year "educational war" that ensued as the Secretary of Interior assumed authority over the schools in the Creek Nation. From the passage of the Curtis Act to Oklahoma statehood in 1907, the federal government took control of indigenous education in the region and dismantled the Native national school systems. Creek freedmen then became categorized as African Americans and subject to Jim Crow laws mandating racially segregated schools. Meanwhile, Euro-American children benefitted from increasing opportunities for schooling. As this unfolded, Creek leaders resisted the federal takeover while Creek children and parents attempted to reform the negative consequences of this reconfiguration.

During this period, expanding federal authority combined with the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy to facilitate the colonization of the Creek school system. For Creek citizens, however, this period marked only a new chapter in a century long battle in which they had not only survived but also thrived. Subsequently, they battled Congressmen, the Secretary of the Interior, and particularly the new Superintendent of Schools in Indian Territory in an effort to retain autonomy over their education system. Throughout this struggle, two clear trends emerged. First, Creek citizens remained resilient in their efforts to control and protect educational opportunities for their children even as

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protection of the people of the Indian Territory, and for other purposes," Sect. 19, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Volume I*, compiled and edited by Charles J. Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 97.

their political survival seemed tenuous. Second, federal officials demonstrated hypocrisy, shortsightedness, and negligence in implementing the Curtis Act and subsequent federal Indian education policies.

In many ways, this conflict complicates the traditional narrative of Native American education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In particular, this chapter focuses on efforts of Native peoples to protect rather than reject education. Dozens of studies have carefully detailed the U.S. government's systematic policies to assimilate Native Americans in boarding schools during this period.[4] Scholars focus either on education in boarding schools as a tool of assimilation policy or on the consequences of the education campaign on tribal cultures. Although their studies offer insights into federal Indian policy and the persistence of Native cultures, their dominance has caused scholars to focus on education as an imposition on Native peoples and a tool of cultural degradation. Like the experiences of Native Americans in federal boarding schools, the situation in the Creek Nation also emerged within the context of assimilation policy, Progressive era campaigns to marginalize people of color, and the expansion of federal power.[5] Yet, the Creek Nation, as well as the other Native nations in Indian Territory, provide a

[4] A number of studies examine the effects of assimilation policy on Indian identity, as well as the agency and cultural persistence among Native students at specific schools. See K. Tsianina Lomawaima, *They Called It Prairie Light: The Story of Chilocco Indian School* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Myriam Vuckovic, *Voices from Haskell: Indian Students Between Two Worlds, 1884-1928* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); Clyde Ellis, *To Change Them Forever: Indian Education at the Rainy Mountain Boarding School, 1893-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Brenda J. Child, *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families, 1900-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

[5] For studies that examine Native American education in these contexts see Adams, *Education for Extinction*; Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Cathleen Cahill, *Federal Fathers and Mothers: A Social History of the United States Indian Service, 1869-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

counterexample, one in which indigenous peoples struggled for, instead of against, education.

Individually and collectively, Creeks continued to protect their own interests and resist federal authority even without a government apparatus to back them. The education of their children remained a primary concern. For instance, Creek school official P.R. Ewing insisted that continued education held the key to future welfare of the Creek people. He affirmed, "It is admitted everywhere that education is the life and strength of a nation; this being true, we should in my humble opinion work to instill new life and energy in our educational work among the rising generation with a will that would indicate that we fully meant to hold a place among men, if not as a nation, at least as individuals."[6] As Ewing faced the prospect of his nation fading from existence, his commitment to Creek children's education and the continued future his people reflects the attitude of citizens throughout Creek country.

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Just as they had adamantly opposed the Curtis Act, Creek authorities continually squared off with federal officials after it became law. Even as the new legislation disrupted the regular functions of the school systems, educators, superintendents, and education supervisors in the Five Nations remained dedicated to carrying out their duties as usual. Secretary of Interior Ethan A. Hitchcock, however, used the legislation to extend federal authority over the Native-controlled schools. He created a new position, the Superintendent of Schools for Indian Territory, to oversee the transfer of power over education. Subsequently, the federal government and the Creek Nation

[6] P.E. Ewing, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Annual Report to the Creek Council, n.d. Creek Nation Records, microfilm roll 49, slide 38847.

simultaneously claimed the right to manage and control the school systems that Creeks had been building for over half a century.[7]

That year, Creeks confronted the newly appointed Superintendent of Schools, John D. Benedict. Born in Clermont, Indiana, in 1854, Benedict attended the local common schools during early childhood. After his family moved to Illinois in 1869, he graduated high school and then began teaching. He was not, however, finished pursuing his own education. While teaching school for several years, Benedict continued his studies at the University of Illinois and the Illinois State Normal School. With his experience and higher education, he was able to gain administrative positions, including an eight-year stint as an Illinois County Superintendent and as Assistant State Superintendent.[8] President William McKinley then appointed him as the Superintendent of Forest Reserves in the New Mexico and Arizona Territories in 1898. Benedict only held this position for a few months, but during this time he visited an Indian boarding school outside of Phoenix. According to Benedict, he realized during the visit that he would like "'to have charge of a nice Indian School.'"[9] As luck would have it, the very same day he received a telegram from the Secretary of the Interior asking if he was interested in a position as Superintendent of Education for Indian Territory. He quickly accepted the job. Equipped only with the order to take complete

[7] This, of course, was not the first time the federal government attempted to assume authority over the Native schools. In 1874, the Speaker of the House attempted to include an amendment on a bill, allowing the Secretary of the Interior to appoint a supervisor of education in Indian Territory. The rationale was that the Five Nations received a combined annual disbursement of $120,000 for educational purposes over which the federal government had "no control or direction." A delegation from the Five Nations successfully presented a memorial to Congress in protest arguing that such a position would "be interference with the laws and rights of the Indians, conflict with their authorities, and consequent discord, confusion, and injury to the schools of the civilized tribes." Memorial of Indian Delegates from Indian Territory Protesting against The Adoption of the Amendment Proposed by the Senate to Bill (H.R. 2343) S. doc. 117, Senate, 43rd Congress, June 1, 1874.

[8] John D. Benedict, "Reminisces," ed. Muriel Wright, *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. 33, 1955, 473.

[9] Benedict, "Reminisces,"479.

control of the Five Nations' schools, Benedict departed for Indian Territory. Little did he know "the Indian Tribes' officials had not agreed to relinquish control of their schools to the federal government."[10]

Upon his arrival in the Creek Nation in early 1899, the new surroundings and the circumstances of his position shocked Benedict. Although his responsibilities included instituting a new educational program among the Five Nations, he had absolutely no background knowledge or cultural understanding of the societies he was charged with educating. He was shocked to learn that "the Five Tribes had their own school laws, its own school system, its own teachers and its own schools and that the school laws had been in operation for half a century or longer." He was even more surprised to learn that during this period "the Federal government had nothing whatever to do with them, they had been constructed, managed, and maintained exclusively by the Indian Tribes."[11] Benedict did not appreciate the importance of the education system to the Creek people, its role as a national institution, and the nation's right to control it.

Perhaps most troubling of all is that Benedict failed to understand the negative reception that he received when he arrived among the Creeks. As he recorded, "My feelings can scarcely be imagined upon learning that every one of these tribal officials insisted that the Federal Government had no right to assume any control whatsoever over their schools and that, as a Federal school official, I had no business here." Benedict, whose conduct was driven by a sense of cultural and racial superiority, was under the impression that the Creek people would welcome his presence, as well as the

[10] Benedict, "Reminisces,"480.

[11] John D. Benedict, "My Educational Experience," Indian Pioneer Papers, Vol. 7, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, 130.

type of schooling that he was supposed to implement. He portrayed himself as a personal savior of the Native people in Indian Territory and was determined to bring them "civilization" as he understood it. Meanwhile, he did not recognize Native sovereignty and had little understanding of the children whose education he was sent to oversee. As a result, he soon found that executing his task would be far more difficult than he had ever anticipated.[12]

Creek school officials greeted Benedict with antagonism in encounters he found to be "discouraging and perplexing." They dismissed his assertions that he was there to "help them and that it would be necessary to make radical changes in order to effect much improvement." Creek officials informed him they would not carry out his proposed reform agenda stating, "it could not be done because it was not in accord with the laws of the tribe."[13] As Benedict explained to the Secretary of the Interior, "They all construed their treaties to mean that they should still continue to control their schools under their own tribal laws unmolested. Their officials and attorneys strenuously insisted that the Secretary of the Interior had no right to any control whatever over their schools and that I was an imposter."[14] Though Benedict attributed this to misunderstanding on the part of Creek officials, they were correct. Previous treaties specifically protected their right to control their own schools, and the Curtis Act did not clearly specify that the Creek Nation would relinquish autonomy over its national school system. Even if it had, Creeks remained opposed to the legislation.

[12] Benedict, "My Educational Experience," WHC, 130-135.
[13] Benedict, "My Educational Experience," WHC, 133.
[14] John D. Benedict to R.A. Ballinger, Secretary of the Interior, January 6, 1910, box 1, folder 4, John D. Benedict Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division (hereafter cited as OHS).

Alexander McIntosh, the Creek Supervisor of Public Instruction, emerged as Benedict's most vocal adversary. According to Benedict, McIntosh "shunned me as much as possible, telling his friends that he did not need my assistance, and that he did not intend for me to have anything to do with the management of Creek schools." Rather than recognizing the political motivations behind this act of resistance, the shortsighted Benedict resorted to racial stereotyping, writing that McIntosh, a product of the Creek school system, was simply "an uneducated half-breed."[15] To McIntosh, Benedict was the latest in a long line of insensitive federal officials who presumed to govern Creek lives. As he complained to Principal Chief Isparhecher, "There are now in our midst parties acting in the capacity of Supervisors or Superintendents of the Creek National Schools, who have interfered greatly with my work of managing the school affairs of the nations. These parties claim an appointment through the Secretary of the Interior."[16] McIntosh continued to go about his duties as usual despite the intrusion.

The struggle between the two men climaxed when McIntosh attempted to fulfill one of the main responsibilities of his office, appointing superintendents for the high schools. When William McCombs stepped down from the position at the Eufaula High School, McIntosh appointed his uncle, Luke McIntosh, to the job. Luke McIntosh, an educated man who had attended a Creek mission school and then universities in Arkansas and Tennessee, had previously taught in several schools and served as

[15] Benedict, "My Educational Experience," WHC, 134.

[16] Annual report to Principal Chief Isparhecker for the scholastic year of 1898-1899 by Alex McIntosh, Superintendent of [Public Institutions]. Handwritten and signed draft, box 1, folder 7, Indians of North America, Creek Manuscripts and Documents, McFarlin Library Special Collections, Tulsa, OK (hereafter cited as CM&D; Typescript of the document can be found as "Letter from Alexander McIntosh to the Principal Chief of the Muskogee and the Secretary of the Interior, October 6, 1899, "Correspondence Relative to the Public Schools" in Creek Manuscripts, *Indian Pioneer Papers,* Vol. 103, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, 158-159.

Superintendent of Schools. Despite this experience, Benedict accused Alex McIntosh of political patronage and Luke McIntosh of incompetence. These accusations fit with Benedict's overall conviction that educators produced from the Creek school system were uneducated, incompetent, and only appointed based on a system of patronage. The incident became widely publicized after Luke McIntosh moved his family into the school to assume the position. When Benedict failed to persuade the superintendent to vacate the boarding school, the desperate supervisor was forced to call upon a U.S. Indian agent for law enforcement. The dramatic dispute reached a climax when McIntosh was removed forcibly from the school.

Nevertheless, McIntosh's ousting did not resolve the issue. Benedict threatened to withhold pay from any teachers that had been previously appointed by the Creek Superintendent, directly undermining Alex McIntosh's authority. Furthermore, Benedict appointed Alexander Posey, the Creek intellectual, poet, and educator, who had cooperated with the Dawes Commission and other federal officials, as the Eufaula Superintendent. Posey, however, had a less than friendly relationship with Alex McIntosh, and this only further complicated the struggle. Posey had previously attempted to block Alex McIntosh's appointment as the Creek Superintendent of Public Instruction. After Benedict appointed Posey, McIntosh did not help his own case by making a number of allegations concerning Posey's conduct at the school, though an investigation turned up no proof of wrongdoing. Personal grievances aside, McIntosh's authority as Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Creek Nation had been

completely undermined by Benedict's attempts to exert federal control over Creek education.[17]

Still, McIntosh remained unwilling to abandon his position. He first attempted to compromise with Benedict, suggesting they both withdraw their appointees for the Eufaula school and "mutually agree on another appointment." Benedict refused. McIntosh next made an appeal directly to Chief Isparecher and then to Secretary of Interior Hitchcock. After citing the progress of the schools and his accomplishments for the year, he brought his charges against Benedict. McIntosh indignantly claimed, "to my utter disgust, the Supervisor proceeded to make various changes and refused to sanction quite a number of my appointments, and hindered in various ways the smooth workings of school affairs."[18] He further indicted Benedict's actions, stating, "He claims power to withhold the pay of those Teachers whose appointment by me he refused to approve."[19] McIntosh then asserted that Benedict's actions were not legally sanctioned because neither the Curtis Act nor instructions from the Secretary of the Interior stipulated that the Superintendent of Education for Indian Territory would have this level of control. Attempting to secure his own position, McIntosh went on to say that he was "a tenured officer of the Creek Nation and am held responsible by the Nation, for the conduct of the schools of the Nation."[20] Implicit in these statements was McIntosh's unyielding rejection of the federal policy that not only stripped him of his position and authority but also robbed his people of their rights.

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[17] Daniel F. Littlefield, *Alex Posey: Creek Poet, Journalist, and Humorist* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 110-111.

[18] Annual report to Principal Chief Isparhecker for the scholastic year of 1898-1899 by Alex McIntosh, Superintendent of [Public Institutions]. Handwritten and signed draft. Box 1, folder 7, CM&D.

[19] Annual report to Principal Chief Isparhecker for the scholastic year of 1898-1899 by Alex McIntosh, Superintendent of [Public Institutions]. Handwritten and signed draft. Box 1, folder 7, CM&D.

[20] Annual report to Principal Chief Isparhecker for the scholastic year of 1898-1899 by Alex McIntosh, Superintendent of [Public Institutions]. Handwritten and signed draft. Box 1, folder 7, CM&D.

Although the Secretary of Interior responded to McIntosh's grievances, he did not do so sympathetically. Reasserting his own newly acquired authority, he replied with a letter asserting, "you are advised that the Superintendent of Schools for the Indian Territory acts under the direction and authority of the Secretary of the Interior, who is charged with the disbursement of all funds due the Creek Nation, under the provisions of section 19 of the act of Congress approved June 28, 1889."[21] The Secretary of Interior, however, did not stop with this simple reiteration of his authority under the new legal terms. He went on to state "It is the desire of the Department that only competent persons shall be employed as superintendents of the schools…surely the authorities of the Creek Nation ought not to be willing to have any person employed in the school service who is unfitted mentally or morally for the position he occupies."[22] The Secretary's words implied that the previous Creek teachers and superintendents were inferior and that only a federal official could ultimately ensure that competent educators served in the Creek schools.

The incident made it clear to officials in the Creek government that if they could not ignore Benedict's authority, they would need to mitigate it. In 1899, Pleasant Porter succeeded Isparhecher as Principal Chief. Porter, who had been one of the main architects of the Creek education system for decades, did not intend to relinquish control of it easily. Though he had been far more conciliatory with federal officials than other leading Creeks, he used his political capital to try to negotiate favorable conditions for Creeks as they entered into this transition period. In 1900, Porter led a

[21]Letter from the Department of Interior to Alexander McIntosh, 1899, "Correspondence Relative to the Public Schools" in Creek Manuscripts, *Indian Pioneer Papers,* Vol. 103, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, 165.

[22]Letter from the Department of Interior to Alexander McIntosh, 1899, "Correspondence Relative to the Public Schools" in Creek Manuscripts, *Indian Pioneer Papers*, WHC, 166.

Creek delegation to Washington, D.C., in an attempt to reach an agreement concerning unresolved issues of authority and jurisdiction in the Creek Nation. Although the Secretary of the Interior expected the Native nations to forfeit complete control of their national institutions, including schools and courts, Porter refused. He insisted, "The reason the Creeks were not willing to give up their courts or the management of their schools was that such a concession on their part would be a confession of their incompetency and a reflection upon their honesty." According to a newspaper account of the negotiations, "the Creeks are obstinate and the Indian office is equally unyielding." Porter held strong, and as a result "the deadlock was on and the prospects of an amicable agreement remote."[23]

Ultimately, the principal chief managed to maintain some remnants of the Creek national school system and did what he could to limit federal authority. Once the Creeks and federal officials finally reached an agreement on March 8, 1900, it included the provision that "The schools are left as they now are, under the control of the Indian authorities, with United States supervision." Thus, the existing schools would continue to operate, and a Creek official would continue to fill the position of Superintendent of Public Instruction. The Superintendent of Education for Indian Territory, however, would continue to oversee the system. To make matters even more complicated, a federally appointed Creek Supervisor of Schools would assist Benedict in overseeing

[23] "Porter elected by safe majority, September 14, 1899." box 1, folder 20, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC; "Porter heads delegation in deadlock with Indian Office regarding the United States taking over courts and schools in Indian Territory, March 8, 1900," box 1, folder 29, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC; "Porter in Washington, unwilling to give up Creek control of schools and courts in Creek Nation because such an act would reflect upon honesty of Creeks, March 10, 1900," box 1, folder 30, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

Creek education.[24] With Benedict already at odds with the Creek education officials, Porter saw the additional position of the Creek Supervisor as an opportunity to protect Creek interests.

Porter had no official say in who would serve in this supervisory position over Creek education, but he had a particular person in mind for the position and made his recommendation nonetheless. Shortly after the new Creek agreement, Porter and David Hodge, another delegate wrote directly to the Secretary of the Interior strongly recommending that Miss Alice Robertson receive the appointment. In the letter, they explained her family's longstanding relationship with Creeks, including her mother and father who were "distinguished for their religious and educational services, covering half a century of time." Porter and Hodge maintained that Robertson had inherited her parents' mission to serve the Creek Nation. They noted, "Her ability as a teacher is such that she might have commanded excellent positions elsewhere, but she has preferred to cast her lot with our people, and has devoted the best years of her life in earnest effort for their betterment, and she will in the future continue to render faithful service to them." Robertson, an active member of the Board of Indian Commissioners, previous employee at the Indian Office, long-time educator in the Creek Nation, and personal acquaintance of President Roosevelt was well qualified, and Porter and Hodge's earnest request was granted. Though Robertson struggled with the authority of the Creek government in the past, her intimate understanding of Creek schools and communities, and longstanding relationships with teachers and officials, made her far better equipped than Benedict to oversee the national schools. Porter recognized the

[24] "Editorial giving contents of Creek agreement made with Dawes Commission concerning land allotments, schools, courts, etc., March 15, 1900," box 1, folder 31, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

clear limitations of Creek officials' ability under federal authority, not only in educational affairs but also for all Creek government functions. Nevertheless, by securing Robertson's appointment, he hoped to ensure some protection for the institution he helped build. Despite her qualifications, however, Robertson still represented the federal government rather than the Creek Nation and still worked directly under Benedict's authority.[25]

Benedict realized his success or failure with the Creeks would have an effect on the transition to federal control among the other Indian Nations whose schools he and his subordinates administered. As he remarked, "I must either demonstrate my authority over the Indian schools, or resign my position, for the school officials of the other tribes were watching with a good deal of interest, the outcome of the squabble over the Creek schools."[26] Much to his chagrin, the other Native nations watched as this public struggle dragged on and it became clear that Benedict intended to dismantle all of the long-standing Native institutions. For instance, the Choctaws and Chickasaws argued, "It would be a wrong against the modest pride to wrest from the Choctaws and Chickasaws their schools, their highest edifice. Our present school system is the work of many years of earnest effort and steady improvement: and to take from us an institution cherished in its growth to close attachment, would be at least unfair."[27] Aware of the sentiment against him, Benedict attempted to exert complete authority with the power of the Secretary of the Interior behind him.

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[25] Pleasant Porter and David Hodge to E.A. Hitchcock, Secretary of the Interior, April 3, 1900, series 2, box 9, folder 6, AMRC. For more on Robertson see previous chapters and for a brief biographical sketch see Grant Foreman, "The Hon. Alice M. Robertson," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10, no. 1 (1932): 13-17.

[26] Benedict, "My Educational Experience," WHC, 143.

[27] *Acts and Resolutions of the Choctaw Nation Passed at its Regular Session, 1899* published reprint (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1975), 46.

From Benedict's perspective, he triumphed in the initial "educational war" with McIntosh. Nevertheless, he soon found himself face to face with another adversary, James Gregory, Alex McIntosh's successor as Superintendent of Public Instruction. In particular, Gregory criticized Benedict's clear preference for Euro-American educators over Creek educators. Already, when Gregory took office in 1900, non-citizens held a majority of positions in the Creek school system with only thirty-four employees identified as "Indian" compared to forty-three "Negro" and fifty-six "White." The new federally mandated School Rules and Regulations for the Creek Nation stipulated that, "In the appointment of superintendents, teachers, and other school employees, preference shall be given to citizens of Indian blood where they are competent to pass the necessary examinations and otherwise qualified." Nevertheless, Benedict formed "an opinion against Indian superintendents" regardless of their qualifications.[28]

After Benedict and Alice Robertson made a series of hiring decisions in 1900 and 1901 without consulting Creek school officials, Gregory wrote a letter of grievance directly to the Secretary of Interior, invoking the "rights of appeal" included in the school regulations. Just as McIntosh had done two years prior, Gregory offered a detailed list of complaints against Benedict. In particular, he cited six cases of the supervisor appointing white teachers over qualified Creek teachers. In one case, Alice Robertson and Benedict appointed a Tennessee man "by the name of Griggs" as principal teacher at the Coweta School. Griggs "made himself obnoxious in a very

[28] Votes in House of Kings for Superintendent of Public Instruction, October 10, 1900, Creek Nation Records, microfilm roll 49, slide 38788; James Gregory to the Secretary of the Interior, September 9, 1901, box 46, RG 48, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NARA, College Park, MA; Annual Report of the School Supervisor for the Creek Nation, Indian Territory, included with the Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, 1900, *Annual Narrative Reports, Volume* 1, RG 75, entry 9, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX.

unbecoming manner," sent students to run his personal errands during school hours, and on one occasion "exhibited his naked body" to the Creek Superintendent's wife. After his "practices became so unindurable and insulting," resentment from the local community forced his resignation. Benedict then appointed another white man, Mr. Price, who tried to "infringe on the duties" of the school's Creek Superintendent, J.H. Alexander. Gregory confirmed that Price was an excellent teacher and only acted upon the instructions of Robertson and Benedict, who sought to undermine the superintendent's authority. Gregory strongly warned the Secretary of the Interior that good teachers in the Creek Nation "abhorred the acts of the Supervisor of Creek Schools" and "this feeling extends throughout the nation."[29]

The drama did not end there. The next year, Gregory attempted to appoint two Creek men, J.H. Alexander and Charles Gibson, as school superintendents in accordance with "the best interests of the schools and wishes of the patrons." Alexander had previously served as the Coweta Superintendent and despite interference from Benedict and Robertson, his work showed "his excellent capacity for such duties." He was also "a well-educated Creek Indian…and dearly beloved by the Creek Indians." As for Gibson, Gregory described him as "the best school man we have in the Creek country excepting no race of men." He too, had been educated in the Creek school system and was a prolific author. Nevertheless, Benedict and Robertson deemed them incompetent and opposed their appointments "as per their committal to two white men." Again, Gregory invoked the school regulations that stipulated preference would be given to "citizens of Indian blood where they are competent to pass the necessary

[29] James Gregory to the Secretary of the Interior, September 9, 1901, box 46, RG 48, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NARA, College Park, MA

examinations and otherwise duly qualified and suitable." Thus, Gregory "demanded an examination be made of Gibson and Alexander," but Benedict immediately denied this request.[30]

In response to Gregory's charges, Benedict attacked the Creek official's credibility, stating, "Superintendent Gregory is a farmer…and is not competent to conduct teachers' examinations."[31] Though Gregory did farm, Benedict chose to ignore his numerous intellectual accomplishments. He attended school in Coweta, and "His command of the English language was remarkable, and he was considered one of the best interpreters in the Creek Nation and equally good at making translations." He then studied law and was elected to the position of judge. Moreover, he was widely respected by his fellow citizens as a Creek historian, intellectual, and published author and poet.[32] Nevertheless, blinded by prejudice, Benedict dismissed him as "incompetent" and Gregory's lawful appeals had little effect. Though the conflict dragged on for months, federal officials upheld Benedict's appointments.

This set a disturbing precedent for de-indigenizing the Creek school system. Benedict's continuous dismissal of educated Creek teachers and school officials as incompetent and his preference for white teachers, no matter their relative qualifications or behavior, signaled the undoing of the Creek school system. This combined with the influx of non-citizens students in the schools and the newly mandated federal authority marked the loss of Creek authority over their own education. As a result, opportunities declined for Creek teachers, school officials, and most damaging of all, Creek children.

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[30] James Gregory to the Secretary of the Interior, September 9, 1901, box 46, RG 48, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NARA, College Park, MA

[31] John D. Benedict to Hon. J. George Wright, U.S. Indian Inspector, November 12, 1901, box 45, RG 48, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NARA, College Park, MA.

[32] "Memoirs of James Roane Gregory," ID: 5791, Vol. 36, Indian Pioneer Papers, WHC

As Gregory argued, "It is detrimental to our schools to see our best men are passed upon while the ignorant are exempt from malignant persecution." For Gregory, this marked only one more cause for despair "at the demise of his nation" which he dramatically chronicled in his poem "Nineteenth Century Finality:"

> Nineteen hundred and it rains fire and blood,
> Fast filling up hell and the grave;
> A million lives trampled in gory mud,
> They kill to kill – killing to save.

Gregory, like other Creek citizens had no desire for their school system to be "saved" by Benedict or for their race to be killed by being "saved" through the broader assimilation campaign.[33]

While Gregory, Porter, and other Creek officials continued to spar with federal officials, Creek citizens dealt with the effects of Benedict's policies on the local level. A number of troubling incidents occurred as Benedict implemented changes to the Creek school system. Attendance in the neighborhood began to drop. According to Alice Robertson, "In some cases objection to the teacher" examined and approved by Benedict contributed to this trend. In one instance, a white teacher "married a full-blood girl for the sake of her quarter section of land," though "neither could speak the language of the other." When the young woman attempted to leave the marriage and return to her family, her husband tried to "bring her back with a drawn revolver. Understandably, this violent coercion on the part of the teacher "infuriated the neighborhood" and its members sent for Alice Robertson who dismissed the teacher

[33] James Roane Gregory, "Nineteenth Century Finality," *Native American Writing in the Southeast: An Anthology, 1875-1935*, ed. Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., and James W. Parins (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1995), 87-88.

from his duties. This was not the only instance where Euro-Americans' fraudulent attempts to gain Creek land spilled over into educational affairs.[34]

For example, in 1902 A.E. McKellop appealed to Principal Chief Porter after finding a school on his allotment. He maintained "This school was built by non-citizens, and supported by non-citizen patrons and attended by non-citizen scholars, and was therefore not an authorized school." McKellop reasoned, "It seems to me that in order to entitle the school to such support, that it ought to have some Indian children attending it." Despite these facts, the Dawes Commission sent surveyors to survey around the school and then took possession of his land "for school purposes without McKellop's consent."[35] The Curtis Act stipulated that white settlers could not organize schools on land until the title had been legally transferred from Creek owners. In this instance, the Dawes Commission clearly used the shortcomings of the legislation to privilege the needs of Euro-Americans settlers over the legal rights of a Creek man.[36]

In fact, the growing population of non-citizens in Creek Country and their unresolved education crisis triggered the most serious conflicts in Creek neighborhoods. Although the majority of non-citizens remained unable to organize schools of their own, as soon as Benedict assumed office, they had the option of paying a dollar per month tuition to attend the Creek neighborhood schools. Many rejected this opportunity and continued to demand the federal government provide free schooling for their children.

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[34] Annual Report of the School Supervisor for the Creek Nation, Indian Territory, included with the Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, *Annual Narrative Reports, Volume 2*, RG 75, entry 9, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX, 86.

[35] A.E. McKellop to Principal Chief Pleasant Porter, April 15, 1902, Creek Nation Records, microfilm roll 49, slide 38804; A.E. McKellop to Principal Chief Pleasant Porter, April 19, 1902, Creek Nation Records, microfilm roll 49, slide 38805.

[36] "An act for the protection of the people of the Indian Territory, and for other purposes," Sect. 14, in *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Volume I*, compiled and edited by Charles J. Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 95.

Many of those who did send their children to the Creek schools, though, hoped to take advantage of the Creeks' facilities, teachers, and resources. During the 1899-1900 school year, only 404 non-citizens enrolled in the Creek schools and merely 142 of those regularly attended during this period. "A majority of this small number," however, refused to pay the tuition. Robertson explained in her annual report that "when told, after repeated failures, that they must pay, they left school and tried to injure the teacher in the community."[37]

Though sympathetic to illiterate white children, Robertson recognized the harm that this volatile situation posed to the Creek school system. She heavily criticized the non-citizen population, their failure to educate their own youth, and their interference with Creek education. After non-citizens attempted to intimidate Creeks and overrun their schools, Robertson condemned their behavior to Benedict. "Of all the wrongs, real or imaginary, which the Indians have suffered at the hands of the white man," she explained, "none can compare with this insidious undermining of what was good in their tribal existence by the presence of this mass of ignorant and too often vicious and criminal people."[38] Like her mother Ann Eliza Robertson, who had maintained that whites should feel the "guilt of their destruction," Robertson placed the blame for Creek troubles on those who colonized their lands.[39] This view put her at odds with Benedict.

Benedict's post required him to supervise Native American education, but he championed another cause instead. After assessing the schools throughout Indian

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[37] Annual Report of the School Supervisor for the Creek Nation, Indian Territory, included with the Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, *Annual Narrative Reports, Volume 2*, RG 75, entry 9, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX, 86.

[38] Annual Report of the School Supervisor for the Creek Nation, Indian Territory, included with the Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, *Annual Narrative Reports, Volume 2*, RG 75, entry 9, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX, 86.

[39] A.E.W. Robertson to Leonard A. Gould, October 13, 1897, series 2, box 12, folder 1, AMRC.

Territory, he "became impressed with the utterly helpless condition in which the thousands of white children were left" without the means attend schools. Benedict took it upon himself to throw the weight of his position behind the demands of the white settlers that the federal government provide for their education. He travelled to Washington, D.C., and testified to the House Appropriations Committee, but they initially denied funding to "our white people" because the precedent would allow Congress to be "besieged by every poor settlement in the United States to help them maintain schools." Nevertheless, he continued to lend his assistance to the various white communities that organized and sent petitions to Congress. At a mass meeting held in Purcell in 1900, Benedict delivered an address in which he decried the fact that "The Indians of the Territory are fairly well supplied with educational funds, but no part of their school funds can be used for the education of white children of the Territory." He further praised the civilizing influence of white settlement on Native communities and reminded the crowd "The American common school is the greatest civilizing force in our midst." Audience members printed his address and mailed it to every member Congress to bolster their demands for free education. Benedict meanwhile made several other appeals to the Secretary of the Interior to allocate funding towards white education in the territory.[40]

The persistent demands of Benedict and white communities in Indian Territory paid dividends in 1904 when Congress allocated $100,000 to alleviate their education crisis. They did so under the guise of aid to Native nations. Congress provided the

[40] Benedict, "Reminisces,"492-496; John D. Benedict to the Secretary of the Interior, July 13, 1904, box 46, RG 48, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NARA, College Park, MA; Statement of John D. Benedict n.d., box 46, RG 48, Department of the Interior, Indian Territory Division, NARA, College Park, MA.

funding in a clause of the Indian appropriations bill. Its stated purpose was "for the maintenance, strengthening and enlarging of the tribal schools of the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole Nations and making provision for the attendance of children of non-citizens therein, and the establishment of new schools under the control of the tribal school boards." According to Benedict, "While the phraseology of this clause appeared to make an appropriation for tribal schools, I was told that it was so worded in order to escape the precedent of appropriating money directly for white schools, yet I was informed that I should use it as I thought best." With this funding from the Indian Appropriations bill, as well as the Native nations' education funds, Benedict quickly worked to advance the cause of the "thousands of helpless white children" for whom he felt such sympathy.[41]

As Benedict recalled, the funding, "combined with a portion of the tribal funds and such additional funds as the neighborhoods were able to raise by subscription," allowed him to deliver school privileges to non-citizens previously denied an education. In 1904, Benedict "maintained 445 rural schools, in which were enrolled 5,170 Indian children and 20,995 white children, and also 78 Negro schools which were attended by 4,034 Negroes." In the years that followed, Congress continued to make additional appropriations, including $100,000 in 1905, $150,000 and surplus court fees in 1906, and $300,000 in 1907. Thus, under the direction of the Supervisor of Education for Indian Territory and with the support of funding from the Creek education fund and the Indian Appropriations bill, non-citizens received substantial advantages in the Creek national school system. In many neighborhoods, the schools built and sustained by the

[41] Benedict, "Reminisces,"492-493.

Creek Nation for decades enrolled very few Creek children and a large number of white students.[42]

This further infuriated Creeks and other Native peoples who not only resented the federal exercise of authority over educational matters but also feared this change would further marginalize their children within the emerging racial order of the territory. Principal Chief Porter, who had openly supported the idea of mixed schools as long as non-citizens paid their way, strongly rejected the move. He accused federal officials of taking Creek funds and applying it "to the education of white children" under the misleading front of answering the pleas of Creeks to improve their schools. Porter made it clear that "the Indian is making no such plea."[43] The Choctaw and Chickasaw nations also opposed Benedict and Congress's efforts to provide for non-citizen using tribal funding. Choctaws and Chickasaws issued a memorial in which they criticized Congress' disingenuousness: "By disguising the intended injury to the Indians in the garb of noncitizen education, it is hoped that our active friends may be disarmed…why should our tribal affairs be thus disastrously interfered with?"[44] Although Congress attempted to mask provisions for non-Indian children as generosity towards Native peoples, Creeks and others clearly recognized the intended consequences.

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[42] Benedict, "Reminisces,"493-494; Angie Debo also concluded "Although these appropriations were usually referred to as gratuities to the Indians, their real purpose was the creation of educational opportunities for non-citizens." See *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, reprint edition, 1973), 70.

[43] "Statement of Hon. Pleasant Porter," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 640.

[44] Memorial from the Principal Chief of the Choctaw Nation, Etc. April 26, 1900, Senate Doc. No. 313, 56th Congress.

Benedict led the campaign for free schools for Euro-American settlers, but non-citizen African Americans in the Creek Nation also benefitted from the subsequent federal subsidies. Like white settlers, African Americans flooded into Indian Territory, primarily settling in areas already occupied by African Creeks and previously settled African Americans. Many families sought out opportunities for social advancement, particularly education, in Indian Territory, despite the increasingly segregated school systems. As Alice Robertson observed, "there is a prevalent impression throughout many parts of the south that in Indian Territory a sort of Promised Land of social equality exists for the negro. This brings hosts of negroes here." Because "so few occupations are open to educated colored persons" throughout the Southern states, African-American teachers in particular emigrated to Indian Territory seeking job opportunities.[45] Despite this perception of social opportunity among African Americans, the shifting balance of power during the territorial period indicated that Euro-American settlers intended to marginalize both African Americans and Native Americans in social, political, and economic institutions.[46]

Creeks recognized the double threat that the incoming African American population posed to their nation. Not only did African American migrants act as colonizers, their presence also provoked Euro-American racial hostilities. As a result, Creeks sought to distinguish themselves from African Americans. James Gregory, for instance, expressed alarm at the idea of African Americans threatening Creek identity and resources. "Runaway negroes slaves from Tennessee, Texas negroes, and a horde

[45] Alice Robertson to the Department of the Interior, "Annual Report of the Supervisor of Creek Schools," August 1, 1903," series 2, box 21, folder 9, AMRC.

[46] Gary Zellar, *African Creeks: Estelvste and the Creek Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 247-249.

of out casts and miserable dregs of society are to be perfured [sic] in on us as being genuine Creek Indians, they are to take our land and money and turn our children of noble birth out of their inheritance to take the places of low caste dogs," he lamented.[47] African Creeks also felt threatened by the African Americans from the states, despite the fact that in previous decades many had successfully integrated themselves into their communities. They recognized that under the changing system, their African blood would cause them to be categorized with African Americans from the states rather than as Indians. Subsequently, they sought to draw boundaries between themselves and non-citizens. Thus, as more and more African Americans entered the school system, "a movement began in the African Creek rural communities to exclude state freed people's children." In 1904, the Creek Council introduced a measure to bar African Americans from the Creek freedmen schools, but the Office of the Interior overrode the decision.[48]

Only a few years prior, Creek children, Indian and Afro-Indians attended thriving national schools, while Euro-American and African American non-citizens had no legal access to the same institutions, teachers, or education funding. Now, under Benedict's direction, non-citizens crowded Creeks out of their own institutions to the alarm of Creek families. Eufaula Harjo, a member of the Four Mothers Society and the Snake movement, testified to the effects of this:

> In Indian Territory there is lots of schools in the Territory. There has always been lots of schools among the Indians ever since we came here, and we were proud of our schools, and our children went to them until the white man came in and crowded us out and took our schools away from us, and it seems to me that the little children and the little negro children should not be made to go to the Indian schools that the Indians made with their own money…Now, when I take a little Indian child to school the white man and the negroes will go before me to

[47] J.R. Gregory to Napoleon Bonaparte Moore, June 9, 1899, series 2, box 6, folder 4
[48] Zellar, *African Creeks*, 248.

> school with their children and they will put their children first and they will push mine out of school, and that is the way it will go.[49]

As Harjo's statement suggests, some feared that Native peoples would fall to the bottom of the racial hierarchy as both Euro-Americans and African Americans received undue advantages.[50]

Throughout the rest of the territorial period, Creek students, parents, community members, and political officials continued to resist federal-led changes to both the neighborhood schools and the boarding schools. Benedict, who retained his office during this entire period, remained a main target of their criticism. He fielded serious complaints and allegations brought about by his decisions and those of school employees under his supervision. Meanwhile, he never hesitated to produce glowing

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[49] "Statement of Eufala Harjo, of Hanna, Ind. T.," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 92.

[50] While the majority of Creeks continued to resist federal intrusion, they accepted allotments and followed Porter's cooperative approach. A minority of Creeks turned, however, turned to more extreme forms of resistance, rejecting both federal authority and Porter's conciliatory tactics. Beginning in 1895, some Creeks actively participated in the Four Mother's Society, an intertribal religious and cultural revitalization organization that adamantly resisted the allotment of communal lands and the intrusion of the federal government in the Native nations. By 1900, this resistance became far more politicized as an organized dissident movement coalesced among a minority of politically conservative Creeks. Chitto Harjo, or Crazy Snake, a member of the Four Mothers Society, and his followers met at the Old Hickory stomp rounds, and organized a separatist government. This "Snake" movement as it came to be known, rejected the Curtis Act and declared it would continue to adhere to the terms in the 1832 Treaty and the 1867 Creek Constitution. Their government declared its intention "to pass laws and to execute the sane upon all citizens of the Creek Nation without regard to any act of congress in force in the Creek Nation." These laws prohibited Creeks from accepting allotments, renting to white tenants, and hiring white laborers, crimes punishable by arrest, fines, and whippings. This caused alarm among non-citizens and Creeks who did not join the dissident movement. Harjo, a skilled orator and charismatic leader, gained approximately five thousand followers from the Five Tribes. Although the U.S. Marshalls attempted to disband the Snakes on several occasions, squaring off against their armed Light Horsemen, the movement remained largely non-violent and continued for nearly a decade. Although contemporaries labeled this as an "Indian Uprising" comparable to earlier episodes of violent resistance, the episode is best categorized as an "attempt to resist by constitutional forms."[50] Contemporaries and early Oklahoma historians were quick to categorize the Snakes anti-assimilationist stance as movement of traditionalist, uneducated "full bloods" opposed to progress. The imposition of the "traditional" versus "progressive" dichotomy on the Snakes and the remaining Creek population is misleading and conflates anti-assimilation with an anti-education stance. The Snakes wished to protect their sovereignty and national institutions, guaranteed by the 1832 Treaty and solidified in the 1867 Constitution. Both of these documents made provisions for the education of Creek children and the Snakes hoped to preserve this along with the rest of the "old ways." Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 57.

reports about his own work and place any blame for failure on the Creek people. Alice Robertson also garnered criticism, but her often stated "deep interest…in the work and in the Creek people" and her social and political capital throughout the nation shielded her from the brunt of it.[51] Her predecessor, Walter Falwell, a school principal and normal institute instructor from Kansas, also had his fair share of struggles as he negotiated a precarious position as the go-between for Benedict and Creek officials.[52] Together, the Superintendent of Schools and the Creek Supervisor fielded numerous criticisms as they attempted to de-indigenize the day schools and failed to provide proper care to Creek students still enrolled in the boarding schools.

As the political struggle carried on between Creek and federal officials, students in the boarding schools experienced firsthand the effects of federal supervision over education. A detailed examination of the degradation the boarding schools under Benedict's management reveals the degree to which the schools transformed under federal authority. Only a few years before, these schools had been a point of pride for the Creek Nation. Now, even as they remained the only form of education still reserved exclusively for Creek students, federal officials attempted to strip away the Creek identity of these institutions. Subsequently, they increasingly resembled the dreaded federal Indian boarding schools.

Creek students and their families, however, did not passively accept these changes. Federal officials' preference for hiring non-Creek employees, their tendency

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[51] Alice Robertson to the Department of the Interior, "Annual Report of the Supervisor of Creek Schools," August 1, 1903," series 2, box 21, folder 9, AMRC.

[52] "Walter Falwell," from *A Twentieth Century History and Biographical Record of Crawford County, Kansas* **(**Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1905), 611-613, 1905 History of Crawford County Kansas http://www.ksgenweb.com/archives/crawford/history/1905/falwell_walter.html (accessed October 12, 2015).

to undermine Creek teachers and administrators, and their disregard for Native practices sparked considerable opposition. Even more importantly, the failure of federally appointed teachers and administrators' to provide adequate care for Creek children, prompted parents to protest Benedict's policies by appealing to what remained of their own government and petitioning the federal government. This gave further credence to Creek officials' argument that Creek education was best left in the hands of their own people.

Evidence suggests a pattern of inadequate care in the spaces where Creek students both lived and studied. Students accused school officials of failing to provide enough food at mealtimes. As Benedict admitted, "Pupils have always been quick to notice any failure to furnish sufficient food and to write their parents about it." Parents would in turn appeal to Creek officials and Benedict's superiors. Like many causes of complaint against him, Benedict pointed towards the students "Indianness" instead of his own negligence as the source of the problem. He nonchalantly explained away the charges stating, "When it is remembered that Indian boys and girls, as a rule are hearty eaters, it can easily be seen that with the present high prices, no superintendent can afford to furnish an elaborate bill of fare."[53]

Benedict's appointees at the boarding schools came under numerous other allegations of negligence and mistreatment toward the Creek students. Students, parents, and community members frequently accused superintendents of incompetence. Unfair punishments for students was one common complaint. Lucille Byrd, for instance, wrote to Pleasant Porter on behalf of a ten-year-old boy who had been

[53] John D. Benedict to R.A. Ballinger, Secretary of the Interior, January 6, 1910, box 1, folder 4, John D. Benedict Collection, OHS.

dismissed from Coweta Boarding School for taking marbles from other boys' pockets. "I know you can nearly find 99 white children out of a hundred that would take little things that did not belong to them," she wrote. Such a harsh punishment for a minor offense meant that the Creek boy could not be "taught good" at the school.[54] Roley McIntosh also complained that two boys under his guardianship were unfairly suspended from Eufaula High School.[55]

Other parents and guardians worried that students lived in unclean and uncomfortable conditions. Outbreaks of communicable diseases that spread among the school populations reinforced these concerns. In one case, parents accused a superintendent of failing to "show sufficient interest to keep the children free of lice," allowing the children to become "very lousie." In another case, parents accused the superintendent of not giving "proper attention to the health and comfort of teachers and scholars in that he fails to make proper provisions for heating." Other accusations included, "failure to keep up proper repairs" and "neglect about the premises."[56] These accusations had great merit. Benedict, under the impression that the schools would close upon the final dissolution of the Creek Nation in 1906, thought it unnecessary to fund repairs and maintenance at the schools. Thus, the students' accommodations became dilapidated. Creeks who built these schools to be the bastions of higher education within the Creek Nation, watched as their institutions increasingly came to resemble federal boarding schools.

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[54] Lucille Byrd to Gen. Pleasant Porter, Dec. 2, 1901, Creek Nation Records, microfilm roll 43, slide 36217.

[55] Petition to the Supt. Of Public Instruction, February 18, 1907, RG 75, Entry 580, Records of the Muskogee Area Office, Letters Received by the Supervisor Schools, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX.

[56] Petition to the Supt. Of Public Instruction, February 18, 1907, RG 75, Entry 580, Records of the Muskogee Area Office, Letters Received by the Supervisor Schools, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX; John D. Benedict to R.A. Ballinger, Secretary of the Interior, January 6, 1910, box 1, folder 4, John D. Benedict Collection, OHS.

Parents also worried their children did not receive proper supervision and protection. Complaints included that "no attempt was made to keep the boys and girls separated when outside the building." In one case, fear of licentious behavior or even sexual assault emerged when girls' rooms were "not secured under lock and key after nightfall, thus making it possible for any person of evil designs to approach them." Parents also complained administrators allowed their children to leave the schools and go into town unsupervised. One superintendent allegedly went to Muscogee every weekend with "a wagon load of school boys and girls and dumps them upon the streets to stroll and wander around upon the street at their pleasure." Wandering, though, was the least of Creek parents' worries. Accounts of students playing dice and other games of chance alarmed families. Though these boarding schools had not been under missionary control for some time, Creek parents expected the same strict, moral instruction that had always been part of the curriculum at these schools.[57]

Creeks also worried that Benedict's appointees, many of whom were strangers to Creek communities, also set poor examples of moral behavior. At Pecan Creek, one of the Creek freedmen high schools, troubling allegations concerning Superintendent C.H. Taylor's behavior prompted distress. Taylor allegedly came home from town in "a hasty state of intoxication." Back at the school, he "expos[ed] himself in an indecent and disgraceful manner to such a degree that his family found it necessary to drag him in his quarters and shield him from sight of those around." Previously, community members had accused Taylor of stealing groceries purchased to feed students and seducing a girl at the African Creek Orphan asylum. The man's "immoral character,"

[57] Petition to the Supt. of Public Instruction, February 18, 1907, RG 75, Entry 580, Records of the Muskogee Area Office, Letters Received by the Supervisor Schools, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX; Petition to Hon. Isparhecher, n.d. Creek Nation Records, microfilm roll 46, slide 36801.

combined with a number of other charges of incompetence and mismanagement, prompted calls for an investigation.[58]

In some cases, alleged incompetence on the part of school officials became a matter of life and death for Creek students. For instance, Arthur Ewing, a student at Eufaula High School, died of "remittent fever, with some congestion of stomach and bowels." Ewings' friends at the school maintained that he had been delirious for a full day before Superintendent William H. Lester called the doctor or notified his father of the illness. He also failed to inform Ewings' aunt who lived nearby in Eufaula. As a result, the boy's father "did not reach his bedside before his death." His father and other parents levied a list of charges against the superintendent, maintaining that school employees failed to provide "sufficient attention when they are sick" and that Arthur Ewing "died at school for the lack of proper attention."[59] Walter Falwell investigated the matter, but reported to Benedict that, after hearing testimony from Lester, the matron, and the principal teacher, Lester should be "held blameless in the charges."[60] Of course, had Falwell confirmed wrongdoing, it would have reflected poorly on himself and Benedict, who had appointed Lester and whose job responsibilities included supervising the care and protection of Creek students. This left the deceased boy's parents with little recourse.

The objectives of the schools also underwent an insidious change under Benedict's direction. Formerly these institutions offered advanced higher learning,

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[58] Petition to Hon. Isparhecher, n.d. Creek Nation Records, microfilm roll 46, slide 36801.

[59] Petition to the Supt. Of Public Instruction, February 18, 1907, RG 75, Entry 580, Records of the Muskogee Area Office, Letters Received by the Supervisor Schools, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX.

[60] Walter Falwell, Supervisor Creek Schools, to John D. Benedict, March 11, 1907, RG 75, Entry 580, Records of the Muskogee Area Office, Letters Received by the Supervisor Schools, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX

preparing students for prestigious careers as teachers, clergymen, lawyers, entrepreneurs, and politicians. While federal authority undermined Creek control over these schools, Benedict worked to shape the curriculum to reflect the overarching goals of federal Native education at the time. Rather than studying advanced academic fields, including mathematics, Latin, and science, Creek boarding school students increasingly learned manual labor skills. This change not only made the Creek boarding schools more similar to federal boarding schools, but it also reflected a broader change in how federal officials and the American public conceptualized assimilation during the early twentieth century.

During the late nineteenth century, in the minds of Euro-Americans, assimilation entailed the "act of becoming a part of an undifferentiated, 'civilized' society." Creeks and the other Native nations subverted this initial assimilation campaign by exhibiting "civilization" while resisting absorption into the body politic of the United States. As the failures of this first stage became clear by the turn of the century. Rather than attempting to create a culturally homogenized nation-state, Euro-Americans reconceptualized "assimilation" as the key to maintaining a necessary social hierarchy. As historian Fred Hoxie argues, "In the twentieth century American leaders argued that each group should play its proper role and work with others to preserve the social order." Federal officials increasingly clung to the notion that Native education should train students to know their place as "menial laborers in a society dominated by whites."[61]

[61] Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 241-242.

Benedict's vision for the Native boarding schools in Indian Territory reflected this broader shift in the assimilation era. He blinded himself to the fact that the Native schools had produced generations of educators, professionals, and political leaders, who he dismissed as incompetent based on their "Indianness." He wrote, "An education which fits for teaching, preaching, medicine, law, or for clerking in a store is good for those who follow those vocations; but all can not follow them." Instead, Benedict believed "The school should train them for their life work. As these schools have heretofore been conducted their tendency has been to train away from work rather than toward it." According to Benedict, suitable life work for Native students included "to be able to learn how to build houses, how to furnish them, how to care for house and furniture, how to cook food…how to make garments and how to mend them, and how to make and manage the machinery which is now so large a part of all our home and business life."[62] While Creek boarding school curriculum had previously included some manual labor training, it did not come at the expense of academic learning. Under Benedict's charge, however, the schools transformed into institutions designed to marginalize their Native students as a labor force within American society.

In the Creek Nation, specifically, Alice Robertson and Walter Falwell implemented these changes in the boarding school curriculum. During her term in the position, Alice Robertson encouraged manual labor at the three freedmen schools, Tullahassee, Pecan Mission, and the Colored Orphan Asylum, and corresponded with Booker T. Washington on the matter. She noted the changing conditions, including the blending of African Creek and African American communities and the growing tide of

[62] Report of Superintendent of Schools for Indian Territory, included with the Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, 1900, *Annual Narrative Reports, Volume* 1, RG 75, entry 9, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX, 83.

white supremacy. "I am sure you know that here in Indian Territory we have thousands of colored people who have for many years enjoyed absolute equality in political and property rights and almost absolute equality in social affairs…They do not realize the rapidity with which their environment is changing," she explained. She invited Washington to visit the Creek Nation and encourage vocational education since the social distinction between African Creeks and African Americans seemed to be vanishing and "conditions here are such as affect the welfare of the entire race." "If you could come, I believe that the help you could give these people would be measured only in eternity," she explained.[63]

Washington took Robertson up on her invitation and visited Indian Territory. Twenty-four years after he founded Tuskegee Institute and ten years after his famous Atlanta Compromise address, Washington was the leading advocate of vocational training and labor for people of color at the time of his visit. He believed marginalized peoples could find a place for themselves in Jim Crow society through these means. He shared this message in Indian Territory where he found "the three races--the negro, the Indian, and the white man--living side by side." During his visit, he met a number of African Creeks, including A.G.W. Sango, the superintendent of the Tullahassee School. Washington later wrote that the people he encountered possessed "a wholesome desire to do something to make the race respected; something which shall demonstrate the right of the negro, not merely as an individual, but as a race, to have a worthy and permanent place in the civilization that the American people are creating."[64]

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[63] Alice Robertson to Booker T. Washington, May 21, 1904, series 2, box 21, folder 6, AMRC.

[64] Booker T. Washington, "Boley: A Negro Town in the West," *The Outlook* (4 January 1908): 28–31.

Washington viewed vocational education as a means for both African Americans and African Creeks to uplift themselves within the increasingly racist climate in Oklahoma.

Benedict and other Euro-Americans, however, envisioned manual labor curriculum as the solution to both "Indian Problem" and the "Negro Problem" because of its potential to preserve a menial labor force subservient to the white race.[65] Under Benedict's supervision, Walter Falwell, Robertson's successor as the Creek Supervisor of Schools, began to transition the Creek boarding schools for Indian children into manual labor institutions. He even sent teachers to the state manual training school in Pittsburgh, Kansas, to take a special manual training course to ensure they successfully implemented the curriculum in the schools. In particular, Falwell hoped Creek students would focus on woodworking, fence building, and agriculture - a far cry from the advanced intellectual pursuits of students in the previous generation. Falwell maintained, "I am convinced that it is the thing to do and that in the end it will prove of more value to these people than an ordinary education would be to them."[66] Local Euro-Americans supported this sentiment as an editorial in one local newspaper revealed: "The duty of the government is plain. Compulsory education, enforced manual labor is the key that will unlock all Indian difficulties and solve the Indian problem."[67] Ironically, federal officials and white colonists alike failed to see that they were themselves the cause of the Natives' difficulties.

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[65] For comparisons of African American and Native American education in the Progressive Era see Kim Cary Warren, *The Quest for Citizenship: African American and Native American Education in Kansas, 1880-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) and Jacqueline Fear-Segal, *White Man's Club: Schools, Race, and the Struggle of Indian Acculturation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

[66] "Statement of Mr. Walter Falwell, Supervisor of Schools for the Creek and Seminole Nations," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 246.

[67] *The Edmond Sun*, January 9th, 1890.

In light of these negative effects, conflict between federal officials and Creeks continued as the date scheduled for the final dissolution of the Creek Nation, March 5, 1906, drew near. In the months leading up to this day, Creek politicians continued to try to mitigate the damage of federal legislation upon their nation. Principal Chief Porter had been a leading voice in the Sequoyah Constitutional Convention, an international effort among members of the Five Nations for Indian Territory to enter the union as a separate state. Congress, however, rejected separate statehood, leaving Porter and other Native leaders with limited options. In January 1906, Porter and George Washington Grayson travelled to Washington, D.C. They appeared before the Indian Committee of the House, chaired by none other than Charles Curtis, with the goal "to impress upon it the reasonableness and justice of the contentions of the Creek council." According to Porter and Grayson, "The Committee made a few changes in the original bill, but to us it was very evident that the suggestions and amendments offered by the Indian delegates did not go for much." The Five Tribes Act, approved on April 26, 1906, laid out the final steps towards tribal dissolution.[68]

Although citizens throughout the Creek Nation feared all of their institutions would suddenly shut down, Congress approved an extension of the government with severely limited authority until the distribution of property could be completed. The large number of non-citizen children dependent on the Native education systems also provided incentive to Congress to approve this measure so the schools would remain in

[68] Letter from Principal Chief Pleasant Porter and G.W. Grayson to the Muskogee People, 1906, Grayson Family Papers Box 6, Folder 16, *Native American Manuscripts*, WHC; "Editorial on Creek delegation in Washington, concerning end of tribal affairs and continuation of office of principal chief, January 18, 1906," box 5, folder 296, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC; Mary Jane Warde, *George Washington Grayson and the Creek Nation, 1843-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 204-205.

operation. The Five Tribes Act made provisions for the schools to remain open until "such time as a public school system shall have been established under Territorial or State government." Unlike the Curtis Act, which indirectly granted the Secretary of Interior control over the Native schools, this act authorized direct control. It stated that beginning March 5, 1906, "The Secretary of the Interior is hereby authorized and directed to assume control and direction of the schools in the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole tribes, with the lands and all school property pertaining thereto…and to conduct such schools under rules and regulations to be prescribed by him."[69] Although the Creek national funding still went to support citizen and non-citizen education alike, the schools fell squarely under federal management.

When the Creek Council convened in October, Porter expressed his uncertainty over the future of Creek education. Pessimistically, he predicted "During this transitionary period, it is not probable that the schools are rending very effective service, and will not until the system of schools for the entire territory is established when statehood is reached."[70] Non-citizen residents in the Creek Nation, however, received the news far more positively. As one newspaper reported, "Supt. Benedict is sending out notice to 1,000 school teachers to continue their schools. The school situation is the only item that has merit in the extension of the tribal government."[71] The extension of the schools meant that non-citizens would continue to reap the benefits of free schooling under the auspices of benevolence towards Natives.

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[69] "An act to provide for the final disposition of the affairs of the Five Civilized Tribes in the Indian Territory, and for other purposes." Sect. 10, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties, Volume III*, compiled and edited by Charles J. Kappler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 173.

[70] "Message of Porter to House of Kings, that the president approved a joint resolution extending tribal government, March 8, 1906," box 5, folder 315, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

[71] "Editorial on Porter, desire to extend tribal government beyond March 1906, March 3, 1906," box 5, folder 299, Pleasant Porter Collection, WHC.

Although the question of whether the schools would remain open had been temporarily resolved, serious concerns over educational funds remained unsettled. Prior to the Curtis Act, the Creek Nation's annual expenditure for education totaled $76,468.40. After the Secretary of the Interior exceeded this budget two years in a row, the Creek Act of 1901 set this amount as the legal limit that the Secretary of Interior could spend per annum. Nevertheless, without any approval or knowledge of the Creek government, the Department of the Interior exceeded this limit to support the schools servicing non-citizens, exorbitant administrative costs, and the salaries of Benedict and his subordinates. Between 1901 and 1905 alone, the Department of the Interior misappropriated $59,847.38 in Creek funds.[72] Ironically, the same officials who often accused the Native governments of irresponsible spending committed this very mistake. In fact, Benedict attempted to justify hiring superintendents with no educational training because they could "be trusted with large amounts of money."[73] While in Washington D.C., Porter and Grayson sought answers for "the department had from time to time, without any appropriation by the Creek Council, and without its knowledge, paid out large sums of money belonging to the nation on various accounts." They officially demanded that the Indian Office issue a statement showing how the Creek Nation's money had been spent, and they published a public letter to Creek citizens exposing the matter. Nevertheless, Porter and Grayson received no immediate redress.[74]

In November 1906, Grayson once again demanded answers as to why the Department of the Interior had mismanaged Creek education funds when he testified

[72] Debo, *And Still the Waters Run,* 74-75.

[73] John D. Benedict to R.A. Ballinger, Secretary of the Interior, January 6, 1910, box 1, folder 4, John D. Benedict Collection, Oklahoma Historical Society Research Division (hereafter cited as OHS).

[74] Letter from Principal Chief Pleasant Porter and G.W. Grayson to the Muskogee People, 1906, Grayson Family Papers Box 6, Folder 16, *Native American Manuscripts*, WHC.

before a Senate Committee sent to investigate affairs in Indian Territory. In a heated exchange with the Senators, Grayson attempted to explain, "The Government took our school funds and did not let us have anything to do with them, or say what should be done with them." When Senator Frank Brandegee from Connecticut asked, "Speaking plainly, you have not confidence in the integrity of the United States Government to expand this money?" Grayson retorted, "We know that we had far better schools, at much less cost than now, when we were running our own schools." Alice Robertson who was present confirmed that while serving as Supervisor of Creek Schools her $1,500 salary, traveling expenses, stationary, and office assistants had all been paid for out of Creek funds and that a portion of Benedict's salary had been as well. Despite her testimony and Grayson's convincing case that tens of thousands of dollars rightfully belonging to the Creek Nation had been mishandled, Senator Teller simply responded, "Well, I don't see that we can do anything" and instructed him to take it up with the authorities in Washington.[75]

In one final attempt, Grayson declared, "We feel that if our money has been taken in an unauthorized manner for one purpose that it will be taken for another. We think it ought to be stopped, and we have tried to get some action on it at Washington and failed, so we appeal to you to aid us in the matter." Rather than offering aid, Senator Bradegee simply shifted the line of questioning to ensure they dropped the matter.[76] Federal officials ignored the issue and the following year the Department of

[75] "Statement of G.W. Grayson" Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 674-678.

[76] "Statement of G.W. Grayson" Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 678.

the Interior once again used $5,175.95 more than the legal limit from Creek funds. Not until 1933, did the Creek Nation recoup some of the losses from this federal misappropriation after the U.S. Court of Claims ruled in its favor in the amount of $65,023.35. This, of course, was only a fraction of what the Creek Nation lost as a result of the allotment process.[77]

Despite these efforts on the part of Creek politicians and the continued protests from Creek parents and school officials, by 1906 the Creek school system had undergone a startling transformation. Only the ten boarding schools, seven for Creek Indians and three for Creek freedmen, remained exclusively open to citizens. Meanwhile, Benedict's preference for privileging white students in the neighborhood schools had clear consequences. In 1897, the year prior to the Curtis Act, the Creek government excluded non-citizens from the schools unless they received permission, paid tuition, and furnished their own supplies. That year, 3,050 Creeks and 2,030 Creek freedmen attended the schools. Although the report does specify how many non-citizens attended that year, by 1902 only 404 non-citizens had enrolled in Creek schools before Congress provided the education subsidies for their tuition.[78] By 1906, however, non-citizens filled an overwhelming majority of seats in Creek neighborhood schools, seats formerly occupied by Native students. That year, only 1,669 Creek students enrolled in the 161 neighborhood schools compared to 9,258 non-citizens. Perhaps even more telling, that same year forty-four of the Creek schools reported an enrollment of zero Creek students. Of the remaining schools, fifty-five enrolled five or fewer

[77] Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 75.

[78] Dew M. Wisdon, U.S. Indian Agent to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Reports of Agents in Indian Territory, ARCIA, 1897, 145; Annual Report of the School Supervisor for the Creek Nation, Indian Territory, included with the Annual Report of the United States Indian Inspector for the Indian Territory, 1902, *Annual Narrative Reports, Volume 2*, RG 75, entry 9, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX, 86.

Creek students, while non-citizens comprised the overwhelming majority of students. This reflected the larger transformation of the Native school systems in Indian Territory. That same year, in the 759 neighborhood schools in the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole systems, only 10,822 students were Indian, while 6,104 were black, and 43,011 were white.[79] Native students were systematically marginalized or denied access to the schools once controlled by their national governments. This severely limited their educational opportunities while privileging those of Euro-American children.

Benedict's belief that only Euro-American teachers could successfully lead the schools also triggered dramatic change in the schools. The number of Creek teachers hired to teach in their own national schools decreased rapidly. Whereas in 1900, thirty-four instructors were identified as "Indian" compared to forty-three "Negro" and fifty-six "White," by 1906, 124 teachers in the Creek schools were identified as white, 64 were identified as "Negro," and astoundingly only four were identified as "Indian." Tellingly the summer normal schools for teachers in the Creek schools no longer provided for Creek teachers. Instead, Walter Falwell only held two normal schools: the "normal for white teachers" and the "normal for colored teachers." Following Benedict's lead, Falwell sought out "active, progressive teachers from the States" who had "been trained in the best schools and colleges of the United States." Although Creek education officials had previously employed well-qualified teachers from the states, they did not do so at the expense of their own qualified educators. After only

[79] Walter Falwell to John D. Benedict, August 1, 1906, Report of the Supervisor of Schools, Creek Nation, ARCIA, 1906, 764-768; John D. Benedict to J. Geo. Wright, Report of Superintendent of Schools for Indian Territory, August 1, 1906, ARCIA, 1906, 749.

seven years under the supervision of the federal government, however, educated Creek teachers had been almost entirely shut out of the system.[80]

The same changes occurred in the other Native nations, and their members joined the Creeks in their efforts to resist the de-indigenizing of their schools. For instance, the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nation requested that those nations' schools simply close until the state of Oklahoma could provide for the education of Native children. This request came in the wake of considerable resistance amongst Choctaw and Chickasaw parents and children against federal supervision of their schools. As Martin Cheatle, the representative of the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nation explained, "The people rebel at the government taking the schools away from us. We had been running the schools successfully for a great many years, and had spent a great deal of money and had graduated our children every year. We had a high curriculum and turned out finished pupils every year. But on account of the expense the Government thought it was too much, and undertook to take the schools away, and now under the new system the people won't send their children." As the Native children stopped attending, the schools filled with non-citizen children and Choctaws and Chickasaws no longer knew where their funds were going. Thus, they maintained, federal control had "proven to be a failure" because Choctaw and Chickasaw children now went without schools rather than graduating from their own institutions.[81] For the Creeks, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, the loss of their schools marked a serious setback in their larger struggle for continued existence.

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[80] Walter Falwell to John D. Benedict, August 1, 1906, Report of the Supervisor of Schools, Creek Nation, ARCIA, 1906, 764-768.

[81] "Statement of Martin Cheatle.," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 927.

In the months leading up to Oklahoma statehood, it became clear that federal officials had not yet sorted out the convoluted relationship between federal, state, and Native school jurisdiction and funding. Generally, federal and territorial officials agreed that, in the new state public school system, Native and white children would attend mixed schools, while African American and Afro-Indian children would attend segregated schools. The issue of funding, however, seriously complicated the issue. Not only had the federal government fraudulently applied the Native nations' money toward the schools in Indian Territory, they had also set the precedent of providing federal funding for Euro-American and African American education. Although the new state of Oklahoma would include a school endowment for $5,000,000, no clear plan existed for how to transition the Indian Territory schools into a state system. No one seemed to know whether Native education funding and federal funding or oversight would continue once Oklahoma entered the Union in 1907.[82]

Eager to maintain his own position, Benedict insisted to Congress that federal oversight over the schools in operation should continue after statehood. He asserted that rather than it simply being the "duty of the state to look after its own schools," Congress created the "peculiar system" and thus had a duty to white residents "to afford relief for the condition that has been brought about through no fault or action" of their own. Benedict remained far less concerned over provisions for Native American education in the new state. This attitude seems to be indicative of his superiors' beliefs

[82] Oscar William Davison, "Education at Statehood," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 28: 63-77; "Statement of Mr. John D. Benedict, Superintendent of Schools, Indian Territory," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 220-229.

as well.[83] Testifying before Congress, the Secretary of Interior was asked, "When the Indian children go to the same school as the white children, how are you going to keep this fund for the exclusive benefit of the Indians?" He first stated, "That is a matter of detail, as to how it is to be done," before finally admitting that he had no answer.[84] Although Congress made clear that education should be the responsibility of the state, the failure of the Department of the Interior to effectively plan for the continued education of Native students and Benedict's lobbying on behalf of Euro-American children necessitated a temporary solution. It seemed that continuing some degree of federal oversight would be the only way to avoid disaster. Subsequently, Benedict maintained his position and authority as Oklahoma entered statehood.

Nevertheless, his tenure did not last long. After a decade of resisting the federal takeover of their schools, Creeks and other members of the Five Nations did achieve one clear victory after statehood: the removal of Benedict from office. The complaints and charges against his management of the schools and the revelation of other nefarious activities finally culminated in an investigation led by the newly appointed Secretary of the Interior, Richard Ballinger, in 1910. The investigation into Benedict's affairs revealed that he had several business dealings that interfered with his duties, including a position as president at the Bank of Muskogee and president of the City Board of Education in Muskogee. Meanwhile, as Benedict had funneled federal and tribal money into free schools for non-citizens, he had neglected his duty to oversee Native

[83] "Statement of Mr. John D. Benedict, Superintendent of Schools, Indian Territory," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 227.

[84] "Statement of Hon. Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Secretary of the Interior," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 2, Senate Report No. 5013, part 2, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 1647.

education. Moreover, the investigation conclusively found that in the schools under his care "Not only has the mental training been sadly deficient but the physical well-being and comfort of the children have been neglected to a degree almost incredible." The years of complaints from Creek children, parents, and officials, as well as those from the other Five Tribes, were substantiated.[85]

In light of the investigation, Secretary Ballinger determined that "These conditions have been steadily growing worse until they have reached a point where further toleration would be a crime." Despite a rather self-indulgent attempt by Benedict to present his innocence in a forty-eight page letter, Ballinger found his explanation "disingenuous" and informed him that he and the supervisors under his direction would be relieved from duty. Not only did Benedict lose his job, the Secretary of the Interior completely discontinued both the position of federal Superintendent of Schools and Benedict's entire division. The Bureau of Indian Affairs then took charge over the remnants of the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole schools, as well as the remaining boarding schools and education funds, making Benedict's ousting a rather hollow victory.[86]

Even with Benedict's removal and federal efforts to reform the administration of Native education, the state of Oklahoma assumed responsibility for the majority of members of the Five Tribes. Oklahoma offered declining educational opportunities for Native peoples. With white supremacy rampant in the new state, the Oklahoma

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[85] John D. Benedict to R.A. Ballinger, Secretary of the Interior, January 6, 1910, box 1, folder 4, John D. Benedict Collection, OHS; R.A. Ballinger to John D. Benedict, February 19, 1910, box 1, folder 5, John D. Benedict Collection, OHS.

[86] John D. Benedict to R.A. Ballinger, Secretary of the Interior, January 6, 1910, box 1, folder 4, John D. Benedict Collection, OHS; R.A. Ballinger to John D. Benedict, February 19, 1910, box 1, folder 5, John D. Benedict Collection, OHS; "Shake-up Long Contemplated" and "Benedict Suspended," box 1, folder 19, John D. Benedict Collection, OHS.

legislature immediately passed Jim Crow laws. Under Oklahoma's new school statutes, Afro-Indians attended segregated schools under a "complete plan of separation" as long as they contained "any quantum of negro blood." Oklahoma law dictated that "white" included "all other persons," and so Creek Indian children were categorized with Euro-American children and expected to attend mixed public schools with them.[87] After nearly a decade of Euro-Americans pushing them out of their own national school system, however, many parents rejected this form of education. Others suffered in the poor, rural schools where not enough taxable land existed to sustain them.[88]

Meanwhile, the majority of those institutions that the nation's education fund had maintained exclusively for Creek children closed. In 1907, Mary Lewis Herrod, widely venerated as the first and oldest Creek educator, wrote an a public letter in which she called for support of "the poor, defenseless orphans who may soon be turned out of the Orphan School to grow up without an education." As predicted, the federal government soon closed the two Creek orphan schools. They also shut down all the remaining boarding schools except for Eufaula, Nuyuka, and Sapulpa, and stipulated that orphaned Creeks would receive preferential enrollment. With their own boarding schools closed, federal boarding schools remained one of the only viable options. Within three years, Creek students, often the most destitute, also began to attend federal boarding schools, primarily Chilocco and Haskell.[89] Federal official's assault on Creek sovereignty and the legal dissolution of their national institutions meant that thousands

[87] General Statutes of Oklahoma, 1908: A Compilation of All the Laws of a General Nature Including the Session Laws of 1907, compiled by Benedict Elder (Kansas City: Pipes-Reed Book Company, 1908), 1358.

[88] Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 277.

[89] Mary Lewis Scrapbook and newspaper article quoted in Carolyn Thomas Foreman, "Two Notable Women of the Creek Nation," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 35 (Autumn 1957), 324; Moty Tiger to Whom It May Concern, October 15, 1910, box 1, folder 13, Moty Tiger Collection, WHC; Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, 277.

of students no longer had the opportunity to attend schools reserved for them under the control of their own government. This left Native children with little opportunity for a quality or culturally appropriate education.

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In addition to land, Euro-Americans colonized the school system, the Creeks' prized national institution. Within less than a decade, Creek education officials lost any true legal authority over school matters and Creek educators were cast out of schools, Creek children suffered abuses, and Creek parents withdrew their children from schools dominated by Euro-American peers. David M. Hodge, noted Creek translator, politician, and delegate to Washington, D.C., reflected on the grave loss this posed to the Creek people. As one of the first students in the Creek school system—he had been among those enrolled in Coweta Mission in 1850—Hodge's own life had coincided with the rise and sudden fall of Creek education.[90] In testimony before a Congressional committee, Hodge bitterly explained the detrimental effects of federal intervention:

> It has been only a short time ago that all over this country they had their schools to educate their children; and it did not matter how unenlightened, uneducated, and ignorant a father was, he was full of anxiety that his sons and daughters should be educated in the learning and ways of the white man. That was only a few short years ago, when every child in all the nation had the advantages of schools, and now it is all changed. Today there are thousands of them that are without the advantages of educational facilities. Their schools are mostly closed or gone. What are left are in the charge of the whites, and the full blood will not send his children to school with white children as a rule. They are subject to insults and abuse, and this is something that the proud spirit of the full blood will not tolerate, so he is careful to keep his children so they will be subject to it as little as possible. In those days we were fairly entered on the road, and were traveling along it very fast, that led to a full and perfect civilization perfectly adjusted to our requirements.[91]

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[90] "Kowetah Students, 1850," series 2, box 1, folder 6, AMRC.

[91] "Statement of David Hodge.," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 2, Senate Report No. 5013, part 2, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 1290.

It seemed to Hodge that instead of the "civilization" his nation had spent decades building, only degradation and marginalization lay ahead.

The federal takeover of the Creek schools triggered these calamitous results. During Benedict's tenure, he neglected his duties to supervise Native students properly while advantaging tens of thousands of Euro-American students. His initiative to de-indigenize Creek education marked the undoing of the institution that Creeks had made a central component of their national identity for over half a century. Creeks and the other Native nations persisted in their efforts to resist federal authority over their schools and to protect their children. But the damage had already been done.

Aside from the obvious negative effects of Benedict's tenure, he left another troubling legacy. From 1899 to 1910, he composed annual reports to the Secretary of the Interior in which he rewrote the history of education in Indian Territory and cast himself as the savior of a failing system. He dismissed the thriving school systems, substantial funding, bureaucratic oversight, and intellectual accomplishments of pupils that had become standard among in the Native nations over the course of sixty-years. Instead, he credited the "patient, untiring, and self-sacrificing" Euro-American missionaries with inducing Natives to attend schools and with any success they found in efforts to "civilize, educate, and Christianize" the Indians. When "the Indian authorities thought themselves wise enough to control these schools," then "educational affairs in the Territory" faltered. He dismissed Natives peoples as incompetent to oversee their own education and portrayed Euro-American educators as the sole instruments of "civilization." In subsequent years, he continued to reshape this narrative, replacing missionaries with himself as the new champion of education in Indian Territory. He

fancied himself a true reformer for Indian children, as well as the champion of uneducated Euro-American children. Because of Benedict's privileged position, federal officials took his denunciation of the indigenous-controlled schools seriously, and his reinterpretation of their history has continued to overshadow the nineteenth-century educational achievements of the Native nations.[92]

Rather than allowing the words of a federal official from a century ago continue to de-indigenize and colonize the history of the Native-controlled schools, historians should recognize the abundant evidence that contradicts Benedict's interpretation. By the end of the nineteenth century, Creek politicians, bureaucrats, activists, teachers, parents, and children contributed to an extensive system of primary and secondary education under the control of their national government. They also viewed the history of their schools with pride and the federal takeover of these institutions with bitter remorse. For instance, Principal Chief Pleasant Porter who died only weeks before Oklahoma statehood provided his own history of Creek education:

> We think that what we had built and established with our own money, and which was the child of our sacrifice and endeavor to find our way to civilization, ought to have been left to us; but it was not. I say we had built up these schools ourselves. Forty or fifty or sixty years we were at the work of building them up and we brought them to a stage of perfection and efficiency that would be a credit to any community of white people anywhere. Our schools were models and so considered everywhere. People – educators – came long distances to inspect them, and we received approbation and commendation on every hand for the way they were built, equipped, modeled, and organized…We, alone, brought this about; but they were taken from us...I say, in all this there

[92] Annual Reports of John D. Benedict, Superintendent of Schools, Indian Territory, John D. Benedict Collection, OHS.

> is not much food for the encouragement of the Indian population in seeking an education.[93]

Porter, one of the earliest graduates of the Creek schools, dedicated much of his career to building and then defending his nation's system of education. The narrative of his own life reflected the larger narrative of Creek education. To seek a more complex and nuanced understanding of Native education in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it is necessary to hear the voices of those like Porter and his contemporaries.

[93] "Statement of Hon. Pleasant Porter," Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Matters Connected with Affairs in the Indian Territory, Vol. 1, Senate Report No. 5013, 59th Congress, Nov. 11 1906-Jan. 1907, 638.

CONCLUSION:

In her memoir *Crazy Brave*, Mvskoke Creek poet Joy Harjo writes, "A story matrix connects all of us. There are rules, processes, and circles of responsibility in this world. And the story begins exactly where it is supposed to begin. We cannot skip any part."[1] The story of Native American education began long before Europeans colonized North America and still continues. It did not begin with Euro-American missionaries who intended to "civilize" so-called "savages," nor did it begin with federal boarding schools designed "to kill the Indian to save the man." We cannot skip the part where the Creek Nation, along with the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole nations, created, supported, and maintained their own systems of education. To do so, would only continue the colonial erasure of rich and diverse educational histories among indigenous peoples.

During the nineteenth century, Creeks nationalized a school system to serve their needs and interests. Creek schools, however, did not open overnight, nor did they simply replicate American common schools. Instead, these institutions emerged through an ongoing and often contested process of political and cultural change. Over an eighty-year period, Creeks rejected, experimented, embraced, reformed, and celebrated education. In doing so, they adapted schools and used them to advance their national agenda. Unlike federal boarding schools, which worked to strip students of an indigenous identity, Creek schools were operated by the Creek people for the Creek people. Communities and parents requested schools and the Creek Council funded and legislated for them. These schools produced teachers who in turn taught new students,

[1] Joy Harjo, *Crazy Brave: A Memoir* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012), 28.

many of whom went on to serve their nation. Thus, education not only shaped the individual lives of those who participated in the system; it also shaped multiple generations of families.

The Creek Nation successfully built a system of public education that reinforced national identity, enhanced cultural and intellectual life, and facilitated social mobility. The schools often reflected divisions of class, race, and gender within the multicultural and socioeconomically stratified nation. Nevertheless, over time, the system became increasingly democratic and inclusive, providing opportunities for both men and woman of African and Native descent, opportunities not generally available throughout the United States. Many Creeks became far better educated than the Euro-Americans who settled throughout Indian Territory, inverting the racialized education hierarchy in the United States. Creek and Afro-Creek individuals attained high levels of education, defying racialized expectations of intelligence. Moreover, the nation itself continuously expanded and reformed the schools over a period of decades. This not only served as an assertion of national sovereignty but also a demonstration that the Creek government could provide for its own citizens.

Despite the Creek Nation's thriving education tradition, the federal government dismantled Creek national institutions, including the extensive school system, during the early 1900s. Educational opportunities and quality for Creek children sharply declined as the twentieth century progressed. Families and communities who continued to value education found their children had few viable options for quality schooling. The majority faced discrimination in Oklahoma public schools. Others opted to attend federal Indian boarding schools. Most enrolled in Chilocco in north central Oklahoma,

Haskell in Lawrence, Kansas, or the Eufaula and Euchee schools now under the direction of the BIA. John Scott, who was born in 1891, attended both Creek and federal schools as a youth. His mother, Nancy Scott, was a Creek teacher at the "Wiogufki, Hilabia, and Tahonteeskee schools," and he attended these as a young boy. After the federal government dismantled the school system, Scott no longer had this opportunity. Instead, he attended Chilocco but "didn't like the school" and "kept running away."[2] He was not alone.[3]

For some students alienated by the Oklahoma public schools, the boarding schools offered them an opportunity to remain connected to other Natives. Carol Fife recalled her experiences in the public schools: "When I was in the third grade, I had a teacher that I always, really liked, and she said something like, 'Oh, look at that old Indian, that old Indian kid.' She'd make some remark about the way I was dressed or the way I looked or something. After that, I just felt so uneasy. I think after that it just did something to me. I felt real self conscious around everyone." After finishing ninth grade in the public schools, she attended Chilocco. There, she remembered, "I felt more at ease, I guess you'd say, at an Indian school but still, it had it's faults too."[4] She found comfort in the "complex web of support and mutual respect" forged among Native students at the school.[5] Fife excelled in her studies and went on to graduate from Oklahoma State University. As Tsianina Lomawaima explains in *They Called it Prairie*

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[2] Interview with John Scott, transcription of volume 30, tape # T-558, Doris Duke Collection, WHC.

[3] From roughly 1900 to 1913, approximately 120 Creek students ran away from the boarding schools. "List of Students Leaving School (Deserters)," RG 75, E. 584, Muskogee Area Office, Bureau of Indians Affairs, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX.

[4] Interview with Carol Fife, transcription of volume 29, tape # T-594-2, Doris Duke Collection, WHC.

[5] Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light,* 44.

Light, these personal narratives of Chilocco alumni reveal, "There is a moral to the story of Chilocco, and it falls somewhere between the depiction of boarding schools as irredeemably destructive institutions and the sentiment that Chilocco 'really was a marvelous school.'"[6] For Carol Fife, this was the case.

From the 1910s through the 1930s, boarding schools often seemed a better option for Creek students because the public school system failed them. The poor quality of the schools and the lack of easy access to them lay at the heart of Creek parents' decisions to keep their children out of the Oklahoma schools. Applications for the boarding schools during this period asked for the reason the student would not attend public schools. Common answers included, "Child too small for the distance and no bridge on Creek"; "short terms, poor facilities"; and "not a well conducted school."[7] The findings of a BIA education survey conducted in 1930 confirmed these issues, as well as the racial marginalization experienced by Native students.[8]

Creek and Afro-Creek students also faced ongoing structural racism in the Oklahoma public school system. The BIA survey found, "Some parents complain that white children do not treat their children right, saying they tease them and even fight them." Afro-Creeks who had been legally categorized as "colored" rather than "Indian" had even fewer options since the only education facilities open to their children were the segregated "Negro" schools. The survey's report explained, "Their children are not tolerated among the whites and the Indians have too much pride to send them to the

[6] Lomawaima, *They Called it Prairie Light,* 164.

[7] See applications in Eufaula Boarding School Student Case Files, 1925-1978, boxes 1-9, RG 75E. 662, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX.

[8] Narrative Report in Education Survey Forms, 1930, box 4, Creek Nation folder, E. 604, RG 75, Five Civilized Tribes Agency, Records of Supervisor of Education, Bureau of Indian Affairs, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX.

negro schools…These children, therefore, with large amounts of Indian blood, really have no opportunity for schooling."[9] Of course, integration would not begin in Oklahoma for another quarter century. The fears of Creeks and Afro-Creeks in the first decade of the twentieth century became a reality as the federal government dismantled their schools. Euro-American colonizers shut them out of the new system in the locations where their own institutions had thrived.

This did not mean, however, that Creeks no longer valued education. Nor did it mean that Creek individuals and communities were powerless or passive in shaping their own opportunities in the twentieth century. In a 1970 interview, Carmen Fife explained the importance of education to her family and community. After graduating from Chilocco, she studied art at the Santa Fe Indian School and then taught at Sherman Institute in Riverside, California. Nevertheless, she wished to return to her home where she soon became an active community leader. With pride, she explained that she and her husband were "Both conscious of the need for education for our children. We have eight children and so far we have two with degrees, and two in college, and this year we will have three in college. And two of our other daughters are taking nigh school…Anyways we always urged them to get as much education as possible." She and her children had faced an uphill battle in securing these opportunities.[10]

Fife recounted her children's experiences with discrimination in the public schools. She explained: "We feel like some of our teacher's there say, 'Oh those full

[9] Narrative Report in Education Survey Forms, 1930, box 4, Creek Nation folder, E. 604, RG 75, Five Civilized Tribes Agency, Records of Supervisor of Education, Bureau of Indian Affairs, NARA, Ft. Worth, TX.

[10] Interview with Carmen Fife, Interview with Carol Fife, transcription of volume 29, tape # T-592, Doris Duke Collection, WHC.

blood Indians, you can't teach them anything.' So they don't half way try to teach them anything…And – we being Indians, we feel like they aren't dumb. They just need a teacher who understands them." This failure on the part of the schools put Fife and other parents in a bind. As she explained, "It is a problem that our community has and well, we don't know how to cope with it except to pull our kids out of there and put them in a school where they can learn something." Fife made this decision when she withdrew her children out of the public schools and sent them to Chilocco as they reached high school age.[11]

Doing so, however, did not address the persistent challenges faced by Creek students who remained in the public schools. As an educated community leader, Fife found she often fielded the complaints of parents whose children faced prejudice by the teachers and administrators in the schools. One superintendent, in particular, sparked a litany of complaints after allegedly making remarks such as, "'You Indian kids don't need to-complain about the food. You don't have to pay your lunch…You don't have to pay for your lunch, so you have no right to complain about the food; 'Oh, look at him, he's just black;' and 'Every Indian home—you- can tell it's an Indian home, They have junk cars all over the yard.'" Fed up, Fife recruited the assistance of Chief McIntosh and an "education specialist" named Mr. Shipley. They gathered "several Indian people in the community" and attended the school board meeting where they lodged their complaints while the superintendent "sat there dumb-founded." The school board fired him the following year in light of the accusations of prejudice. The community members actions echoed those of Creek towns nearly a century before who had insisted

[11] Interview with Carmen Fife, Interview with Carol Fife, transcription of volume 29, tape # T-592, Doris Duke Collection, WHC.

on the expulsion of white teachers who wronged their children in the schools. In both cases, action led to results.

Fife and her community members did not stop there with their efforts to improve educational opportunities. They formed a Parent Teachers Association, recruited the cooperation of the teachers, and worked on a number of projects, such as improving the lunchroom and buying playground equipment. This organization, however, did not directly address the specific needs of Native people in the community. With the assistance of Shipley, Fife helped establish the Indian Center at Muskogee. The center provided resources and programs on important community issues, including housing and sanitation, highway safety, narcotic abuse, education grants, and the importance of reading in schools. Fife also played an instrumental role in facilitating adult learning classes and Native art and craft lessons.[12] Through this process of community action, Creeks found innovative ways to navigate the often-discriminatory federal and state public schools and to preserve the Creek Nation's education tradition. Fife and other members Creek Nation did not need legal recognition of its sovereignty to remain Creek. Nor did they stop valuing Creek education simply because the federal government deconstructed their school system. Various forms of education had always had been an important component of Creek life and continued to be during the twentieth century.

For the Creek Nation, schools served as tools of nation-building from the 1840s through the 1890s. Despite the legal dissolution of the Creek Nation at the turn of the

[12] Interview with Carmen Fife, Interview with Carol Fife, transcription of volume 29, tape # T-592, Doris Duke Collection, WHC.

century, education remained a central aspect of Creek culture valued by individuals and communities. Thus, education has been and continues to be an important aspect of indigenous self-determination. Not only is education a significant part of Native nations' pasts, it is also an important part of their future. The Creek Superintendent of Instruction, William McCombs understood this in 1867 when he explained to a group of Creek schoolchildren declaring, "Education is the only means by which our people can be preserved…Education gives us foresight. If we are educated we can, by its means, see what is to be our destiny."[13] Well over a century later, the influential first female Cherokee Chief continued to build upon the educational tradition of the Five Tribes with her famous statement, "I don't think anybody anywhere can talk about the future of their people or of an organization without talking about education. Whoever controls the education of our children controls our future."[14]

Education is power. Schools can have profoundly positive or negative effects individuals, communities, and nations, depending on wields power over them. Traditionally in the United States, Euro-Americans have exerted power over educational institutions and marginalized African Americans and Native Americans in the process. This, in turn, only further privileged Euro-Americans. In nineteenth-century Indian Territory, however, the Creek Nation along with other Native nations challenged this racialized power structure. They built their own sovereign school systems and produced generations of Native and Afro-Indian peoples far better educated than Euro-American colonizers. The Five Tribes sustained these institutions

[13] "Muskogee Institute Commencement Exercises," *Indian Journal*, June 29, 1867, microcopy, OHS.

[14] Quoted in Carolyn Warner, ed. *The Words of Extraordinary Women* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 38.

for decades and when federal officials dismantled them, citizens of the tribal nations resisted their efforts and then sought ways to mitigate the damage. Institutional racism and white privilege shaped the educational opportunities of Native and African American peoples in Oklahoma during the twentieth century and, as recent school controversies have revealed, continue to do so in the twenty-first century. This, however, was not an inevitable trajectory. Instead, it is the regrettable outcome of harmful federal policies, white supremacy, and the failure to recognize Native sovereignty. As Harjo reminds us, "A story matrix contains all of us."[15] The history of Native controlled education in Indian Territory during the nineteenth century reveals a complex matrix of contested power, sovereignty, and racial identity among diverse peoples. It also contains within it lessons for the future direction of education in the United States.

[15] Harjo, *Crazy Brave*, 28.

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